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International Directive on Dealing with Automated Dialling Equipment in Market, Opinion and Social Research

This Directive is issued by the European Federation of Associations of Market Research Organisations (EFAMRO).

1 Introduction

The use of automated dialling equipment in survey research has opened new opportunities for collecting information by telephone interviews. At the same time it raises a number of ethical, legal and technical issues which must be dealt with by self-regulation of the industry if automated dialling equipment is to be used effectively and responsibly in market, opinion and social research.

2 Implementation

This Directive is addressed to the national associations which are a member of EFAMRO. They shall bring into force mandatory professional rules necessary to comply with the requirements of this Directive at the latest at the end of a period of two years from the date of its adoption.

3 Legal and normative references

Besides in self-regulation of the research industry the use of automated dialling equipment is also subject to national and international laws and other legal regulations. The relevant legal provisions supersede the requirements of this Directive in the case they are stricter or different.

This Directive shall be read in conjunction with the “ICC/ESOMAR International Code of Marketing and Social Research Practice” (3rd revision, published in 1995) which lays down the basic ethical principles and professional rules of market, opinion and social research.

4 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this Directive the following terms and definitions apply:

4.1 Automated dialling equipment

For the purposes of this Directive automated dialling equipment is any equipment capable of dialling a telephone number prior to an interviewer being available to exclusively handle the call.

4.2 Silent call

For the purposes of this Directive a silent call is any call answered by a respondent, who is not connected to an interviewer within a short period of the call being answered.

4.3 Research service provider

For the purposes of this Directive a research service provider is any provider, which conducts studies – totally or partly – in market, opinion and social research according to commonly accepted scientific principles and methods. Research service providers can be private research institutions, academic and university research institutions, in-company research departments, local authorities, official statistics agencies or individuals acting in the same capacity.

5 Requirements

For the use of automated dialling equipment in market, opinion and social research the following requirements apply:

5.1 Ring time

Research service providers shall ensure their automated dialling equipment is adjusted to ensure a certain minimum as well as maximum ring time for all calls before the call is abandoned as unanswered. The minimum ring time should be 20 seconds and the maximum ring time should be 40 seconds.

5.2 Connecting time

Research service providers shall ensure their automated dialling equipment is adjusted to connect all answered calls to an interviewer within a very short period after detecting that the call has been answered. If no interviewer is available within this period, the dialling equipment shall promptly disconnect answered calls. The maximum connecting/disconnecting time should be 4 seconds.

5.3 Rate of silent calls

Research service providers shall ensure their automated dialling equipment is adjusted to ensure the rate of silent calls is no more than a certain percentage of all calls made per day. The rate of silent calls should not exceed 4 percent of all calls made.

5.4 Further calls

Where a telephone number has received a silent call, research service providers shall not handle any possible further calls to that number within a certain period of time by their automated calling equipment but by an interviewer. The minimum length of this period should be one month.

5.5 Statistics of silent calls

Where automated dialling equipment can generate silent calls, research service providers shall create daily statistics which record the rate of silent calls. Statistics of silent calls shall be kept up to date and shall be stored for a certain period in either electronic or manual format. The minimum period of storage should be 3 months.

5.6 Documentation of automated dialling equipment

Where automated dialling equipment can generate silent calls, research service providers shall ensure that written procedures are available which detail:

- a) How automated dialling equipment is set.
- b) How silent call generation is monitored.
- c) How silent call complaints are dealt with.

5.7 Research service provider identification

Where automated dialling equipment can generate silent calls, research service providers shall provide relevant caller line identification, if technically possible. The telephone number given for that purpose shall connect respondents to either a live operator or a recorded message.

Respondents calling back shall be informed of:

- a) The name of the research service provider who made the call or on whose behalf the call was made.
- b) Assurance that the call was made for purposes of market, opinion and social research only.
- c) Any relevant information to allay any fears as to the purpose of the call.

Calls to the telephone number given by the research service provider shall incur no unreasonable charges to respondents.

6 Adoption

This Directive has been adopted by the members of the European Federation of Associations of Market Research Organisations (EFAMRO) on May 5th 2006.