

Telemarketing survey scams widespread, *VoxPop* survey finds

Almost four in 10 Canadians report being victimized by telemarketers posing as survey researchers

Toronto, May 5, 2009 – Canadians are being victimized at an alarming rate by fraudulent telemarketers illegally posing as survey researchers to sell products or raise money, according to a national *VoxPop* (Voice of the People) survey by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA), which governs and regulates Canada's opinion research industry.

The poll found that, over the past year, 38 percent of Canadian adults were contacted to participate in a research survey that actually turned out to be an attempt to sell them a product or service or ask for a donation.

"Legitimate survey researchers never, under any circumstances, sell or ask for money, and they always give the research company's name and information on the nature of the research at the beginning of the call," says *VoxPop* spokesperson, Brendan Wycks, Executive Director of MRIA. "Any attempt to sell or raise money following a survey request is a scam. People who receive such calls should immediately report the company's name and, if possible, its phone number to *PhoneBusters*, a national anti-fraud call centre jointly operated by the Competition Bureau, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ontario Provincial Police."

Canadians who are victimized by fraudulent telemarketers posing as survey researchers can reach *PhoneBusters* by calling toll-free 1-888-495-8501.

These illegal practices, known in the opinion research industry as Sugging (Soliciting Under the Guise of Interviewing) and Mugging (Marketing Under the Guise of Interviewing), carry a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison under the federal Competition Act. That penalty may be increased to up to 14 years in prison, under a review of the Competition Act currently underway.

The frequency of fraudulent telemarketer calls was highest in Alberta (44%) followed by Quebec (40%), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (39%), Ontario (36%), Atlantic Canada (35%) and British Columbia (33%).

Under the *Competition Act*, telemarketers are required by law to identify their company and disclose their true purpose at the beginning of a call. The Personal Information Protection and Electronics Documents Act (PIPEDA) also requires business organizations to obtain valid consent from Canadians before collecting, disclosing or using their personal information.

The MRIA has worked diligently with Canadian legislators to stop Sugging and Mugging with significant success. A similar study by MRIA in 2007 found that 41 percent of Canadians had experienced Mugging or Sugging in the previous year.

"The modest decrease in these destructive telemarketing practices over the past year is good news, but what is needed now is greater public awareness of the problem and how to stop it," says Wycks. "First and foremost, survey respondents need to know their rights and how they can protect themselves."

The MRIA's Charter of Respondent Rights, established in 2006, enforces a strict code of conduct upon the Association's members to protect the time and privacy of survey respondents, and makes Canadians aware that they can verify the legitimacy of research projects via MRIA's Canadian Research Registration System.

People can verify the legitimacy and nature of the research they are being asked to participate in by asking for the survey's registration code or calling a toll-free number (1-800-554-9996) for information on the research project. MRIA member research firms will provide this information upon request, along with contact information for the research director who is conducting the study.

Canadians can also visit www.mria-arim.ca to learn more about their rights as survey respondents and about MRIA's *VoxPop* (Voice of the People) information campaign, the purpose of which is to educate Canadians about the value of opinion research and encourage participation in surveys.

The current *VoxPop* survey also examined attitudes towards opinion research, and revealed that a strong majority of Canadians believe survey research creates economic and social value by giving individuals direct influence over decisions made by governments and corporations.

More than eight in 10 respondents (84%) felt surveys and polls serve a useful purpose; 79 percent agreed participation in surveys gives people the opportunity to influence public policy issues; and 75 percent agreed that public opinion surveys lead to products, services and public policies that better meet consumer needs and wants.

"Canadians overwhelmingly maintain a high regard for survey research, as evidenced by the belief of 63 per cent of respondents that opinion research strengthens Canada's democracy by giving people a say in important decisions by governments and corporations," says Wycks. "No other vehicle offers such influence, or delivers such tangible benefits to all Canadians. That's why, when telemarketer scams victimize research respondents, we all lose."

MRIA's *VoxPop* survey studying the incidence of Mugging and Sugging was conducted by Harris-Decima via telephone between January 29 and February 15, 2009, with a national random sample of 2,035 adult Canadians and is considered accurate within ± 2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20.

This survey is part of a series from *VoxPop*, a campaign to give voice to Canadians and encourage participation in opinion research. ***VoxPop: You speak. We listen. Things improve.***