



Privacy & Data Protection

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Political cold-calling unlawful

Political parties are being warned that they risk prosecution and financial penalties by using automated telephone messages to drum up votes during the election campaign.

The Conservatives and the Scottish National Party have already breached rules on the use of this technology, the latter party using the voice of the actor, Sean Connery, to attempt to woo voters.

Richard Thomas, the Information Commissioner, wrote to all parties in mid-April, telling them that legislation strictly prohibits making automated calls “for marketing purposes to anyone

without that subscriber’s prior consent.” He added, “It is worth noting that many individuals tell us that they consider such calls to be extremely intrusive and even disturbing.” Even, apparently, the ones from Sean Connery.

The Tories have made over 300,000 automated calls to voters in marginal seats with a message from Michael Howard, the party leader, talking about some of the key issues facing Britain and promising to “show there is a better way.”

Labour has also made a large number of automated calls, but a spokesman insisted that the party had acted within

the law because it had been doing so only for the purposes of voter identification.

Mr Thomas’s office has now confirmed its view that market research calls asking how people intend to vote, as opposed to those for marketing purposes seeking to win votes, were legal. A spokesman said, “Although we have received a number of complaints about the behaviour of political parties, we have not resolved them yet. If evidence is provided showing that there has been a clear breach we would obviously take it very seriously.”

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Video surveillance in the home—controversial new technology

Untrusting husbands and wives will soon be able to receive live images of their spouses’ daily activities delivered straight to their mobile phone screens.

Tiny cameras, which can be placed unobtrusively around the house, are capable of transmitting live images to any designated mobile phone.

MobileMonitor, the name of this pioneering surveil-

lance service in the United States, allows errant spouses to be caught in the act. Orange, the mobile telephone network, is expected to make the service available in the United Kingdom by the end of May.

The surveillance service is likely to be extremely popular—one in four marriages apparently ends in divorce due to

adultery, and the UK is reputed as having the ‘highest rate of infidelity’ in the Western World—and will be promoted as one of the multitude of services available on new 3G networks.

From a legal point of view, the problem area for the use of the technology is that it will, most likely, transmit the personal data of the watched

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