

Doorstep selling campaign strategy

Launch date: Monday 16 November 2009

Summary

There is a diverse network of anti-doorstep crime initiatives, with a range of organisations working nationally and locally to raise awareness of the issue. The OFT campaign on doorstep rogue traders needs to boost this activity, not compete with it or reinvent the wheel. Additionally, the most effective means of reaching those most likely to be victims of doorstep crime is outreach through appropriate intermediaries. As a result our campaign will be made up of two key elements: PR around which national and local initiatives can coalesce and outreach supported by appropriate collateral.

Background

Much detriment in doorstep trading results from aggressive sales techniques, many of which the Consumer Protection Regulations now outlaw. The economic climate may make it more likely that consumers will be exposed to high-pressure selling techniques on the doorstep. Specifically, there is the problem of rogue doorstep traders, who use a high degree of coercion and / or deception to exhort money. The OFT estimated in 2004 that there were an estimated 16,000 cases reported to TSS a year, though the overall incidence could be much higher. Although there are crimes involving smaller items, most of the detriment and distress stems from higher value house and garden repairs where losses can run into thousands. Victims are likely to be older consumers living alone, especially women. The 2009-10 doorstep selling campaign aims to empower elderly consumers to refuse offers of on the spot building and maintenance repairs.

Strategic objective

- To empower more consumers to refuse cold callers offering on the spot house or garden repairs.

Communications objectives

- To raise awareness of the issue of rogue doorstep traders offering on the spot home and garden repairs.
- To urge elderly consumers not to agree to on the spot house repairs.
- To encourage elderly consumers to check with someone they trust before agreeing to house repairs.

Target audience

Primary

- UK residents over 70 years - with women living alone being a priority, especially those who are housebound or socially isolated.

Secondary

- Stakeholders working to combat doorstep crime or those working with elderly people.
- All consumers, as they may have elderly friends and family that they care for.

Key messages

- If a trader knocks at your door do not agree to on the spot house repairs.
- Be wary of special offers or warnings that your house is unsafe.
- Talk over any repairs with someone you trust.
- If in doubt call Consumer Direct (08454 04 05 06).

Tone

We want to set a positive tone asserting that elderly people don't have to be passive victims. An issue is that some householders don't want to appear impolite, we need to encourage them to be more confident in refusing callers.

Victims of doorstep crime often attract local media interest, particularly where case studies exist. Given the nature of this crime, we will

encourage the use of case studies only where consumers have volunteered themselves as such.

Strategy

Our communication strategy has two strands:

Outreach

Outreach will be the most effective way of reaching the most isolated elderly people. Existing outreach comes from organisations already working on doorstep crime initiatives (mainly local authority trading standards services and the police) and from other intermediaries working with the elderly: social services, unpaid carers, charities and meals on wheels volunteers. There are also intermediaries in the wider community: doctor's surgeries, post offices, libraries etc. who could distribute information.

PR

In order to create something around which these groups can coalesce, our campaign will deliver a strong PR campaign. This is a good option because:

- This is a subject the media likes, as evidenced by scams coverage versus all other OFT campaigns.
- A PR campaign is something that all the disparate groups working in this field can get involved in and which will support their existing activity, rather than the OFT campaign duplicating effort.
- Media coverage will be focussed on reaching carers, friends and family as well as the over 70 years.

Tactics

The first phase of activity will launch on Monday 16 November 2009. Further activity will be scheduled for April / May 2010 when rogue traders start looking for work in the summer season - a separate strategy will be developed for April / May 2010.

Media coverage

This will have four elements:

1. Partners engaging local media

We have developed a media toolkit for stakeholders. It contains template press notices, ideas for outreach, and guidance on engaging the media. It is written for non-communications specialists.

2. Selling in to national and regional media

Our PR agency is responsible for selling the launch of the campaign into national and regional media.

3. Community messaging and radio advertising

Various local and national radio stations will proactively support our campaign by developing scripts to include our campaign's key messages in their daily programmes. These stations will take ownership of our key messages as part of their commitment to their community, by informing their older listeners and carers about how to handle doorstep sales tactics and the risks of rogue traders. This can include, for example, studio debates, where the DJ will encourage listeners to phone in with thoughts/stories which are discussed on air, or running quizzes to drive traffic to their website for further information etc. We are also placing a 30-second radio ad on various national and local radio stations. The community messaging and radio advertising starts on Monday 16 November for two weeks.

4. TV filler

We have produced a public information film, which will reach daytime TV audiences. It shows an elderly homeowner refusing a pitch from a rogue trader. We do not pay for the airtime, and therefore cannot guarantee when it will get coverage. Broadcasting houses will receive the filler for use from Monday 16 November 2009.

The filler will also be available on the OFT's YouTube channel - www.youtube.com/user/OFTWebEditor - from Monday 16 November.

Outreach and distribution of collateral

1. Toolkit

The toolkit we have created suggests some ideas to support TSS officers, community police officers and others when they are talking to groups of elderly consumers. These include a role play script to practise dealing with traders and a few questions on doorstep trading to help break the ice at sessions. The TV filler will also be a useful tool in this environment.

2. Collateral

Using intermediaries, we will distribute collateral that can act as a reminder to elderly people in their homes. This will be made up of two leaflets (one for elderly consumers and one for those caring for them) and a doorhanger. This collateral will also be produced in a Welsh/English bilingual format.

From Monday 16 November 2009, leaflets and doorhangers will also be available to download from www.of.gov.uk/doorstepselling or to order directly from our mailing house on 0800 389 3158.

3. Doordrop

We will target approximately 3.5 million people over 75 years via a leaflet doordrop. This will allow us to get relevant material direct into the homes of our target audience. According to COI's report on reaching older consumers, elderly audiences are more likely to read and keep useful direct mail.

4. Publicity register

Collateral will go out to relevant publicity register partners – which proved very successful for the 2008-09 doorstep selling campaign. Through the publicity register service we intend to reach people like wardens in sheltered accommodation whom we could not easily reach any other way.

Resources

Budget: £600k

Evaluation

We will measure the impact of our activities, for example, by using metrics to measure media coverage and pre and post campaign awareness. Measuring the impact of outreach work will be done in partnership with partners, for example, a survey of TSS and police force partners to gauge whether they felt the campaign had boosted local activity.

Further information

For further information on this campaign, please contact one of the following:

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