

Doorstep selling campaign 2011-2012

1 Background

- 1.1 Since 2004 the OFT has run a doorstep selling campaign to reduce consumer detriment resulting from rogue doorstep traders. The campaign aims to inform consumers of their rights and increase their confidence when buying on the doorstep. Working with key stakeholders, particularly local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS), has been an integral part of all previous campaign activity.
- 1.2 The 2011-12 campaign will build on previous activity, with the aim of empowering elderly consumers to make effective purchasing decisions when buying on their doorstep and reducing their vulnerability to rogue traders. In addition, this year's campaign will also incorporate findings from the OFT mobility aids market study.

The issue

- 1.3 In May 2004 the OFT carried out a market study into the doorstep selling market that identified that:
- 15,500 complaints about doorstep selling are made annually to local authority Trading Standard Services (note figures do not take into account complaints to other agencies such as the Police)
 - a substantial proportion of complainants are vulnerable consumers such as disabled (around 23 per cent) or elderly (49 per cent)
 - the annual cost of key products and services sold via doorstep selling is a conservative estimate of £2.4billion.
- 1.4 The exact detriment caused by rogue traders is difficult to calculate. This is an under-reported crime, with the main victims (the elderly, living alone) are often embarrassed to come forward and sometimes do not realise they have been deceived or overcharged. It is estimated that the average money individual's

pay to rogue traders is well over £2,000.

- 1.5 In November 2010, the OFT commenced a market study into the mobility aids market. For many consumers, these products are a necessity. Initial findings from this study has highlighted that consumers are experiencing problems when purchasing these items on the doorstep.

Research from previous doorstep selling campaigns

- 1.6 In 2009, the OFT ran a campaign to warn people of rogue doorstep traders offering house and garden repairs (44 per cent of complaints to Consumer Direct are in regard to home maintenance).
- 1.7 This campaign was aimed at the over 70's and included PR activity, radio advertising and door drops.
- 1.8 Pre and post campaign evaluation of the target audience found:
 - although only four per cent of respondents said they have used, or would consider using, a tradesperson who knocked at their door to carry out home or garden repairs, additional questioning suggested 25 per cent may be vulnerable to rogue traders
 - post campaign there was an increase, from 26-33 per cent in the number of consumers who said they had heard publicity about doorstep tradesperson. This was higher for those who listened to local radio or read a free local paper, 39 and 37 per cent respectively
 - 13 per cent of respondents recalled the leaflet and 12 per cent recalled the radio advertisement. Respondents who read the leaflet appear to be less vulnerable to doorstep selling, only 13 per cent compared to 25 per cent overall
 - Overall post-campaign 1 per cent of the target market was less vulnerable to the pressure of a doorstep tradesperson.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The strategic objective is to reduce the detriment incurred from rogue doorstep trading.
- 2.2 To help achieve this objective the campaign aims:
- to reduce the number of the target market potentially vulnerable to the pressure of a doorstep tradesperson from 25 per cent to 20 per cent
 - 40 per cent of the target market are aware of and warned of unscrupulous doorstep selling (increase from 33 per cent)
 - 15 per cent of the target audience are informed on how to manage doorstep selling situations, including high pressure sales tactics through campaign materials (increase from 12 and 13 per cent previously).

3 Target Audience

- 3.1 Primary audience
- UK residents over 70 years - with women living alone being a priority, especially those who are housebound or socially isolated
 - UK residents with a disability requiring the purchase of a mobility aid, with a focus on those over 70 years (this target audience is continually changing as new customers come into the market).
- 3.2 Generally, the primary target audience spend more of their time at home than most people (Age UK's later life in the UK reports that over 65s spend 80 per cent of their time in their home and over 85s spend 90 per cent of their time there). Those that are socially isolated interact with very few people, often limited to some family, carers and doctors.

3.2 Secondary audience

- Consumers who may have elderly friends and family that they care for or potentially be vulnerable to this issue in their lifetime.
- Carers, medical professionals (for example GPs, occupational therapists) and other groups who are in regular contact with the primary audiences.

3.4 The secondary audience will be asked to pass the message onto the primary audience, or help the primary audience make a purchasing decision. The secondary audience help build the target audiences confidence in dealing with doorstep sellers.

4 Key messages

4.1 Key campaign messages include:

- rogue doorstep traders may call on you, be wary of people dropping in on you and offering special deals or telling you that your house is unsafe and needs urgent work
- if a trader knocks at your door you don't need to agree to work or sign anything on the spot, it is OK to think about it or discuss it with someone first
- if in doubt, call Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or visit www.directgov.gov.uk/consumer.

4.2 As well as the above, mobility aids messaging will also focus on encouraging people to shop around before making a decision.

5 Tone

5.1 The tone of the campaign will be that of empowerment. The target audience will be encouraged to be polite, yet confident when dealing with doorstep traders. Case studies will also be incorporated to illustrate the effect that doorstep crime has.

6 Activities

- 6.1 This campaign will focus on partnership work, coordinating local and national activities. We will support this activity with free (PR, fillers and online) and support material distribution. This will ensure that we reach as many of the target audience as possible in a cost effective manner.

Partnership Activity

- 6.2 The following materials will be disseminated to partners:

- toolkit - the Doorstep Selling partner toolkit provides ideas to support partners when they are talking to groups of elderly consumers
- marketing materials – leaflets, online web banners, press materials targeting elderly consumers and those caring from them will be made available to partners and intermediaries.

PR

- 6.3 PR activity will include:

- Selling into national and regional media focusing on
 - key messages, potential case studies as well as recent figures on uninvited doorstep calls to Consumer Direct
 - relevant home and garden repair press as well as consumer monthly titles
 - we will seek to partner with a relevant charities or social services organisations and professional medical titles that resonate with the target audience.

Publicity register

- 6.4 The COI Publicity register includes a range of relevant partners such as libraries, doctor's surgeries, charities, social service organisations. We will use this service to deliver our campaign material to these very relevant audiences who have direct contact with the target audience.
- 6.5 This service will allow us to select organisations that are also particularly relevant to the mobility aids sector. As such, we will produce a mobility aids flyer that will be distributed via this service.

Direct mail

- 6.6 Direct mail activity will include working with key partners that have access to those within the target audience which purchase mobility aid products. We will work with these partners to issue information via their channels, reaching the hard to reach audience in a cost effective manner.

TV filler

- 6.7 We have existing television filler. We will continue to keep in circulation. Television fillers tend to get more airtime in off-peak viewing time. This is beneficial for this campaign as these are time when the primary target audience is at home.

Radio filler

- 6.8 We will create a radio filler to ensure there is an ongoing radio presence at low cost throughout the year.

Online

- 6.9 Although the primary target audience is less likely to be online, we will ensure that information is available through a range of online channels including partner websites and other relevant websites, forums and social media. This will deliver key messages to those of the primary target audience that are online as well as many of the secondary target audience.

7 Timing

- 7.1 Activities promoting doorstep selling will be carried out across the year. The campaign will be launched in July 2011 tying in with the increase in doorstep selling during the summer months.
- 7.2 In September we will focus on promoting issues surrounding buying mobility aids on the doorstep. For the remainder of the financial year campaign messaging will be delivered where appropriate.

8 Budget

- 8.1 The budget for the campaign is £100,000.

9 Evaluation

- 9.1 Alongside the information gathered by the Office through consumer research via market studies, we plan to conduct quarterly omnibus research to monitor changes in consumers' behaviour over time as set out in the objective above. This will not only help inform campaigns but also the wider work of the office.
- 9.2 We will also evaluate the number of complaints to Consumer Direct on doorstep calls, along with evidence gathered by Trading Standards, Neighbourhood Watch and the Police.
- 9.3 As well as the above we monitor the effectiveness of media channels by:
- media coverage generated
 - materials distributed through partner channels
 - partner feedback
 - web statistics.