

Doorstep selling campaign strategy

Launch date: Monday 19th July 2010

1. Summary

1.1 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 continue to be made up of two key elements: PR around which national and local initiatives can coalesce and outreach supported by appropriate collateral.

2. Background

2.1 Much detriment in doorstep trading results from aggressive sales techniques, many of which the Consumer Protection Regulations now outlaw. Specifically, there is the problem of rogue doorstep traders, who use a high degree of coercion and / or deception to exhort money.

2.2 In 2004, the OFT estimated that there were 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.

2.3 According to advice service Consumer Direct, over 12,000 complaints regarding uninvited doorstep sales approaches were received in 2009. Of these, over 5,200 complaints were related to house maintenance.

2.4 Research conducted by OFT following the November 2009 doorstep selling campaign highlighted that 96% of the target audience claimed they would never use a doorstep trader. However, one in four agree with statements that suggest that in some circumstances they might be tempted to agree straightaway to have work carried out by a

tradesperson knocking on their door suggesting that they may be vulnerable to rogue doorstep tradespeople. Feedback from Trading Standards highlights that the high percentage of our target audience claiming that they would never use a doorstep seller does not fully reflect local experience. Doorstep selling is an under reported crime. Many people do not recognise themselves as victims and those that do are often ashamed to admit it. Furthermore, even those who claim to know better are often influenced by the 'pressure of presence' when confronted with a highly persuasive rogue trader.

2.5 The 2010 doorstep selling campaign will aim to build on the work of the November 2009 activity to empower elderly consumers to refuse offers of on the spot building and maintenance repairs.

3. Strategic objective

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

4. 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.

5. Target audiences

Primary

- UK residents over 70 years - with women living alone being a priority, especially those who are housebound or socially isolated.
- All consumers, as they may have elderly friends and family that they care for. This is an important audience since some falling into our target audience can be confused and also not identify themselves in the target audience.

Secondary

- Stakeholders working to combat doorstep crime or those working with elderly people.

6. Campaign KPIs

- To maintain the number of people in the target audience claiming that they would not use a doorstep trader at 96% and reduce those claiming they would use a doorstep trader under certain circumstances.
- To increase the number of people claiming that they would talk over any repairs with someone they trust first.

7. Key messages

- If a trader knocks at your door do not agree to on the spot house repairs, or sign anything on the spot.
- Be wary of special offers or warnings that your house is unsafe.
- Do not make snap decisions. Take time to talk to someone you trust before you make a decision
- If in doubt, call Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or visit www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

7.1 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.

8. Strategy

Our communication strategy has two main strands:

8.1 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.

8.2 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 engages with, 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.

9. Tactics

Last November, OFT launched a doorstep selling campaign which included new materials such as a TV filler, radio advert, leaflet and toolkit. The next burst of activity will launch on 19th July 2010. Materials will be available to order but this July there will be no wider marketing to support the campaign, in light of the government's freeze on advertising spend as part of wider efficiency cuts.

9.1 Media coverage

Key elements for the campaign are as follows:

- **Selling in to national and regional media**

This aims to generate coverage of the key messages through using Consumer Direct data and where possible using case studies to bring this message to life.

- **Partners engaging local media**

The media toolkit designed for partners last November has been updated and will be recirculated. It contains template press notices, ideas for outreach, and guidance on engaging the media. It is written for non-communications specialists.

- **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. The filler is currently available on the OFT's YouTube channel - www.youtube.com/user/OFTWebEditor

9.2 Outreach and distribution of collateral

- **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.

- **Marketing materials**

Using intermediaries, we will distribute materials 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 material has been produced in a Welsh/English bilingual format.

Leaflets and doorhangers which contain key information are available to download from www.of.gov.uk/doorstepselling or to order directly from our mailing house on 0800 389 3158.

10. Evaluation

We will measure the impact of our activities as follows:

- By tracking awareness of the campaign amongst our target audience and claimed behavioural change (noting that this is a problematic measure, owing to the under-reporting of this crime, and the likelihood of this audience not to recognise themselves as victims).
- Through measuring the success of different marketing tools via metrics such as media coverage and reach of outreach work delivered by partners.
- Continuing to gather evidence on this crime with a long-term view of seeing a reduction in the number of our target audience falling victim to a rogue trader. To measure ultimate success over time we will look at complaints data from Consumer Direct, with evidence gathered by Trading Standards, Neighbourhood Watch and the police.

11. Further information

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

Catherine Worswick – catherine.worswick@oft.gsi.gov.uk, 020 7211 8191

Tamara Lewis – tamara.lewis@oft.gsi.gov.uk - 020 7211 8109