

# Scamnesty campaign

Evaluation report

August 2010

OFT1237

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# 1 BACKGROUND

## Corporate objectives / policy

- 1.1 The Office of Fair Trading's (OFT) Annual Plan 2009-10 outlines that it will continue to take strong and effective action to keep mass marketed scams from causing harm to consumers and legitimate business, identifying and acting against new scams quickly and using innovative approaches to further target those already in use.
- 1.2 The term 'scam' is not precisely defined. It is often used by complainants in relation to the whole spectrum of practices from criminal fraud (which may or may not be linked to international organised crime) through knowingly deceptive practices to a small trader who makes an honest mistake (for example, by banking a cheque but forgetting to process the order).
- 1.3 The OFT cannot deal with all scams, but where possible works together with others to reduce the negative impact of scams on consumers and markets. We have a particular interest in developing our capability to deal with online scams, as part of our focus on e-protection.
- 1.4 Mass marketed scams cause about £3.5 billion pounds of detriment to UK consumers every year.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the psychological impact of scams can seriously damage individual consumers' trust in markets. Previous research<sup>2</sup> found that one in twelve people admitted to having been the victim of a scam, and that about half of consumers had at some point been targeted by a scam.
- 1.5 The OFT defines a mass marketed scam as: 'A misleading or deceptive business practice where you receive an unsolicited or uninvited contact

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<sup>1</sup> Research on impact of mass marketed scams, (OFT883, December 2006). Available to download from [www.offt.gov.uk/scams](http://www.offt.gov.uk/scams)

<sup>2</sup> An online survey of 3,000 UK consumers conducted in August 2009 for the Just Tick It campaign.

and false promises are made to con you out of your money'. Types include: Prize draw/sweepstake scams, foreign lottery scams, miracle health cure scams, vehicle matching scams, and working from home scams.

- 1.6 Scams are often targeted specifically at vulnerable or disadvantaged consumers, such as those already in debt. These consumers can suffer disproportionate levels of harm as a result of mass marketed and other scams.
- 1.7 Mass marketing of scams continues to increase as technology allows greater pinpointing of potential victims, and online transactions grow as a proportion of markets. The continued existence of scams online is a potential obstacle to growth in consumer confidence of online markets.
- 1.8 The OFT seeks to reduce the negative effects of such scams through raising consumer awareness and understanding of how these unfair practices work. We do this through general awareness work but also through targeted alerts and specific campaigns, often timed to coincide with seasonal or current problem areas, such as music festival tickets in the summer.
- 1.9 Reporting of scams by consumers is relatively low, and improving awareness can help to increase reporting, which in turn allows the OFT and other enforcers to identify key problem areas and target these with enforcement action and / or consumer alerts.
- 1.10 Some scams are therefore more amenable to OFT action than others (in terms of the fit with our powers, and in terms of prioritisation). Some are for the likes of Serious Organised Crime Agency, Serious Fraud Office, Met Police and others are for local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS), with whom the OFT works in partnership in order to deliver targeted civil and criminal enforcement against scams, where this is appropriate. We also work with other bodies such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the Police where scams overlap with outright fraud and more serious criminal offences.

1.11 Mass marketed scams sometimes originate overseas so the OFT works closely with enforcement agencies in other European Member States, and in other countries, to co-ordinate action and share intelligence in order to deal with the complex legal and practical difficulties in cross-border enforcement.

## **Communications**

1.12 Communications is an important and effective tool that helps to reduce the number of scam victims via consumer education and awareness raising campaigns. It also works alongside disruption and enforcement action, for example, investigating and prosecuting scammers, to reduce the harmful effects on consumers.

1.13 The Scamnesty campaign has successfully run during February since 2008, in partnership with local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS). It's also the OFT's contribution to the international initiative 'Fraud Prevention Month', organised by the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network (ICPEN),<sup>3</sup> of which the OFT is a member.

### **Campaign aim**

1.14 The aim of Scamnesty during February 2010 was to:

- raise awareness of mass marketed scams and to provide advice on how to avoid being scammed.
- to complement the existing work of TSS and other organisations to increase message penetration in local communities, particularly in relation to vulnerable / isolated consumers.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.icpen.org](http://www.icpen.org)

## **Strategic objective**

- 1.15 The strategic objective was to help minimise consumer detriment by reducing the number of people falling victim to mass marketed scams.

## **Communications objectives**

- 1.16 The communications objectives were as follows:
- increase awareness of mass marketed scams
  - help consumers identify mass marketed scams
  - reduce the number of consumers falling victim to mass marketed scams
  - increase awareness of getting advice and information about mass marketed scams from Consumer Direct
  - increase unique visitors to the scams section on Consumer Direct's website.

## **2 CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW**

### **Budget**

2.1 The campaign budget was £570k.

### **Campaign duration**

2.2 Scamnesty ran from 1 to 26 February 2010.

### **Target audience**

2.3 The target audiences were:

- vulnerable consumers (the elderly, unemployed, chronic scam victims) and their intermediaries such as friends, family, and neighbours
- all UK consumers aged 35 to 44 years.

2.4 These target audiences were chosen because:

- the protection of vulnerable consumers is a high priority for the OFT
- vulnerable consumers such as the elderly are more likely to lose higher amounts to scams than other age groups<sup>4</sup>
- consumers aged 35 to 44 years are the most common victims.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Research on impact of mass marketed scams, (OFT883, December 2006). Available to download from [www.ofc.gov.uk/scams](http://www.ofc.gov.uk/scams)

<sup>5</sup> As above.

## **Key messages**

2.5 The key messages were:

- 'Drop it in to drop them in it'. Deposit your suspected scam mailings in our Scamnesty bins across the country.
- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Pass on the warning to watch out for scams.
- Your actions may help protect others from being targeted by scammers.
- If you are unsure of an offer, speak to family or friends and seek advice from Consumer Direct.

## **Campaign activities / channels**

### **Scamnesty bins initiative**

- 2.6 As in the previous two years, the focal point of the campaign was the Scamnesty bins initiative. TSS placed bins in their local communities and encouraged consumers to collect their scam mailings and deposit them. This helped to raise awareness by engaging consumers in their local areas, encouraging people to talk about the issues, and to engage others, for example, friends, families and neighbours. The collected scam mailings also assist TSS and the OFT to identify new scam trends.
- 2.7 The OFT produced a TSS campaign resource pack, posters, bin stickers, and consumer information booklets to provide a consistent brand and advice about the campaign - see Annexe A. TSS developed their own promotional initiatives which included generating PR in their local media.
- 2.8 The OFT promoted the campaign on a national level, securing free PR coverage on TV, radio, newspapers; print and online, magazines and via online bloggers.

## Online marketing and social media

- 2.9 Findings from a prewave campaign omnibus survey<sup>6</sup> showed email as the most common scam approach. Seventy-three per cent of adults having received a scam email in the past year, with nine per cent of adults also having received an approach via social media sites. This insight, together with working in partnership with the OFT's new internet consumer protection team<sup>7</sup> to gather online intelligence, provided the rationale for developing a new online presence for Scamnesty.
- 2.10 The Scamnesty microsite was hosted on Consumer Direct's website and featured an online virtual bin (scamnesty.net) for consumers to forward suspect scam emails and websites. Other features included a search option to locate Scamnesty bins in local areas and advice pages featuring top tips on how to avoid scams.
- 2.11 Online promotion of the scamnesty microsite was carried out via Pay Per Click advertising, banner advertising, email marketing, links from partner websites, Facebook, Twitter, forums, chat rooms, and flickr.
- 2.12 An online media partnership with IPC Media (host of magazines such as What's on TV, and Woman's Own) was also used to target women over 30 years. The IPC website portal showed scams advice and case study videos of women talking about their experiences of scams, such as psychics/clairvoyants, lotteries, work-from-home, slimming and miracle weight loss scams.

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<sup>6</sup> GFK NOP UK pre and post campaign phone omnibus survey carried out 8 to 10 and 15 to 17 January and 5 to 7 and 12 to 14 March 2010. 1,993 respondents in January and 2,000 respondents in March. Target audience: UK adults aged 16+ years.

<sup>7</sup> The OFT's internet consumer protection team was established in October 2009. It investigates unfair online trading practices that pose a threat to consumer confidence in online markets. This work is an important part of the OFT's goal to protect consumers and promote competition and economic growth. Further information can be found here:  
[www.offt.gov.uk/OFTwork/consumer-enforcement/internet-enforcement/](http://www.offt.gov.uk/OFTwork/consumer-enforcement/internet-enforcement/)

## **TV filler and radio advertising**

- 2.13 A TV filler (public information film) was produced targeting consumers aged 35 to 44 years. Transmission times were not guaranteed as TV stations provided the advertising airtime free of charge.
- 2.14 A 30-second radio advert also ran throughout February on national and local stations, targeting consumers aged 35 to 44 years.

## **GP surgeries (Life Channel)**

- 2.15 An advert ran on television monitors in the waiting rooms of doctors' surgeries throughout the UK targeting the elderly, and their friends, families and neighbours - to increase awareness and impact in local communities.

## **Engaging MPs**

- 2.16 To raise the profile of Scamnesty in Parliament and encourage MPs to engage with their local communities about scams, Austin Mitchell MP tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) to gain support for scams awareness issues. A press and information pack was sent to MPs to encourage their support in the campaign.

## **Engaging community based organisations**

- 2.17 To maximise the impact of the campaign, other organisations were encouraged to get involved, for example, Citizens Advice, Help the Aged, Met Police, and Neighbourhood Watch.
- 2.18 A direct mail exercise was carried out using the Central Office of Information's (COI) publicity register (a list of organisations that have opted in to receive information about government campaigns). Organisations such as social services and bingo halls were sent a letter to encourage distribution of the Scambuster booklet - see Annexe A - to vulnerable audiences, for example, the elderly.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **Awareness and recognition**

- 3.1 A post campaign omnibus survey<sup>8</sup> showed small increases of 1 to 2 per cent in awareness levels of scams, such as advanced fee scams, miracle health cures or slimming scams, foreign lottery scams, prize draws and pyramid selling.
- 3.2 The same survey showed that our focus on reporting scams led to five per cent increases in awareness of reporting scams to and getting advice from TSS and the police. Awareness of Consumer Direct as a reporting source, however, fell by one per cent.

### **Number of people reached and frequency of exposure**

#### **PR**

- 3.3 353 items of coverage were generated, a 37 per cent increase from the previous year. This figure includes regional coverage generated by TSS, although it cannot be isolated. 20.1 million consumers over 65 years were given three opportunities to see and / or hear the campaign messages via national and regional TV and newspapers, and online news channels. 10.3 million consumers aged 35 to 44 years were also given one opportunity.
- 3.4 TV broadcast coverage included GMTV, This Morning and The One Show.

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## **IPC media partnership**

- 3.5 The IPC media partnership targeted approximately 1.1 million women over 30 years with the opportunity to view scams advice and case study videos of women talking about their experiences of scams. There were 1,141 page views and 891 page visitors to the campaign pages.

## **Radio advertising**

- 3.6 The radio advert targeted approximately 14.5 million consumers and provided 4.2 opportunities to hear.
- 3.7 Post campaign research<sup>9</sup> found 29 per cent of the 35 to 44 years respondents recognised the radio ad and/or online campaign, with 50 per cent also ordering a Scambuster leaflet or forwarding a scam email as a result.
- 3.8 Positive opinion about the advert was driven by C2DEs. It was considered clear and unambiguous with a strong takeout of the 'too good to be true' message.

## **GP surgeries (Life Channel)**

- 3.9 Five million consumers were given the opportunity to watch the campaign advert on TV monitors in doctors' surgeries.
- 3.10 Post campaign research<sup>10</sup> found approximately one-third of respondents recalled seeing the Scamnesty advert at their surgery, and that it trebled the likelihood of ordering a Scambuster booklet.

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<sup>9</sup> 1,124 respondents took part in an online survey conducted by Virtual Surveys from 10 to 16 March 2010.

<sup>10</sup> The Life Channel evaluation was conducted from 22 February to 15 March 2010 by The ROI Team in 17 surgeries in NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent and Walsall. A questionnaire (4250 distributed, 900 completed) was completed by patients waiting at doctors' surgeries in these areas.

## Scamnesty bins initiative

- 3.11 130 TSS participated in the campaign. A 40 per cent increase from the previous year. 85 TSS placed a total of 1,200 Scamnesty bins throughout the UK in, for example, local libraries, supermarkets, and police stations.
- 3.12 15,652 scam mailings were collected via the bins (6,235 collected in 2009). The top five scam mailing types are as follows:
- prize draw / sweepstakes - 10,729
  - bogus foreign lotteries - 552
  - clairvoyant - 533
  - financial / investment - 237
  - miracle health cures - 44.
- 3.13 Post campaign feedback<sup>11</sup> showed 95 per cent of TSS respondents indicated overall satisfaction with the support and information provided by the OFT to run their campaign elements (including drop-in surgeries, shopping centre events, coffee mornings, a joint OFT/Royal Mail/TSI pilot project to identify and provide advice to serial victims of scams, and 'Scambusters' the musical). 80 per cent also stated they will participate in Scamnesty 2011. Reasons given for not participating again included:
- efforts not proportionate to the actual outcome
  - tougher stance needed on collected mailings - more focus should be given to enforcement activities
  - Scamnesty has run its course.

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<sup>11</sup> A campaign feedback / evaluation form was sent to 130 participating TSS. 38 TSS responded.

## **Online marketing and social media**

### **Pay per click advertising**

- 3.14 Pay per click advertising was used on the Google search network as a cost effective channel to drive online 35 to 44 years users to the Scamnesty microsite (which had approximately 50,000 unique visitors during the campaign period). It delivered 8,731 click throughs with an average cost per click of 92p.

### **Online banner advertising**

- 3.15 Online advertising targeted visitors aged 35 to 44 years using three forum sites: MSN Portal, Unanimis, Sky.com/Showbiz. It resulted in 2,152 clicks to the Scamnesty microsite at a Click Through Rate (CTR) of 0.03 per cent (Industry average is usually 0.01 per cent to 0.03 per cent). The MSN portal was the most cost effective, at £4.38 cost per click.

### **Email marketing**

- 3.16 A top tips scam email was sent to 1.9 million consumers, generating 24,956 click throughs to the Scamnesty microsite. The click through rate was 1.31 per cent, above the industry average of 0.40 to one per cent.

### **scamnesty.net**

- 3.17 40,000 emails containing potential scams were forwarded to the scamnesty.net virtual bin mailbox from 30,750 individuals.

## **Facebook**

3.18 The newly created Scamnesty Facebook profile, which wasn't promoted, attracted 266 fans. The fan base was as follows:

- female - 60 per cent
- 41 per cent - 25 to 34 years
- 18 per cent - 35 to 44 years.

## **Twitter**

3.19 Similarly the new @Scamnesty presence on Twitter had 222 followers, 82 tweets were posted, generating 383 click throughs to the Scamnesty microsite.

3.14 Post campaign research<sup>12</sup> showed 24 per cent recognition of the online campaign materials by the core target audience of 35 to 44 years.

3.15 Furthermore, 49 per cent of the respondents rated the online campaign as 'very good' or 'excellent'. Women responded more positively due to its educational role and its bid to deal with scams actively, for example, report them and talk to others about it.

## **Consumer Direct**

3.16 Reports of alleged scams to Consumer Direct increased by seven per cent during the campaign period.

3.17 Unique visitors to the scams advice section on Consumer Direct's website also increased substantially. For example, unique visitors to the common scams page increased by 114% (Jan 2010: 2575, Feb 2010: 5499).

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<sup>12</sup> 1,124 respondents took part in an online survey conducted by Virtual Surveys from 10 to 16 March 2010.

## **Early Day Motion**

- 3.18 The Early Day Motion gained 85 signatories. MPs from all major parties issued press releases and posted supportive statements on their websites. Feedback from MPs was positive. Many contacted the OFT for further campaign details and about how to get involved. Scamnesty was mentioned also during Prime Minister's Questions.

## **Scambuster leaflet distribution**

- 3.19 141,982 copies of the Scambuster booklet (OFT831) were ordered from the OFT mailing house during the campaign period. (19,062 during Scamnesty 2009).
- 3.20 2,648 Scambuster booklets were ordered as a result of 800 campaign engagement letters sent to Citizens Advice bureaus.
- 3.21 69,847 Scambuster booklets were ordered as a result of 32,018 campaign engagement letters sent to, for example, Social Services, using the Central Office of Information's (COI) publicity register.
- 3.22 The Co-op Financial Services also ordered and distributed 20,000 Scambuster booklets throughout their network.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 This campaign has successfully met its communications objectives. The marginal increase in awareness and recognition from the pre and post omnibus survey was expectable as there are 25 common scams types and a small budget to target consumers. That said, the PR element has been particularly successful at targeting a large number of consumers, generating the most coverage and highest reach compared to other OFT campaigns.

4.2 The re-use recommendations for the Scamnesty campaign are as follows:

- Run a fourth Scamnesty campaign during February 2011 and then consider a different concept for future campaigns if impact is not as high as the previous year.
- As the Omnibus survey awareness and recognition increases are low, one common scams theme only could be considered for the campaign period, to intensify targeting.
- Continue to use PR as the main awareness driver as it's the most successful and cost effective channel.
- Encourage more TSS to participate and increase the number of Scamnesty bins used.
- Increase the use of pay per click advertising instead of online banner advertising, as the return on investment is much higher.
- Re-use Facebook and Twitter. However, a conversational and less corporate style should be used to improve the engagement and impact of Twitter.
- Re-engage with MPs as this is a low cost and very effective route to penetrate local communities.

- Re-use COI's publicity register for successfully for distributing booklets.
- Consider using the Life Channel again to target the elderly, their family and neighbours, as feedback is positive.

## A CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

**Campaign resource pack for TSS** (contained campaign background, objectives, PR / media activity, campaign materials, press releases, case study information). This was forwarded to all TSS participants and regional coordinators.

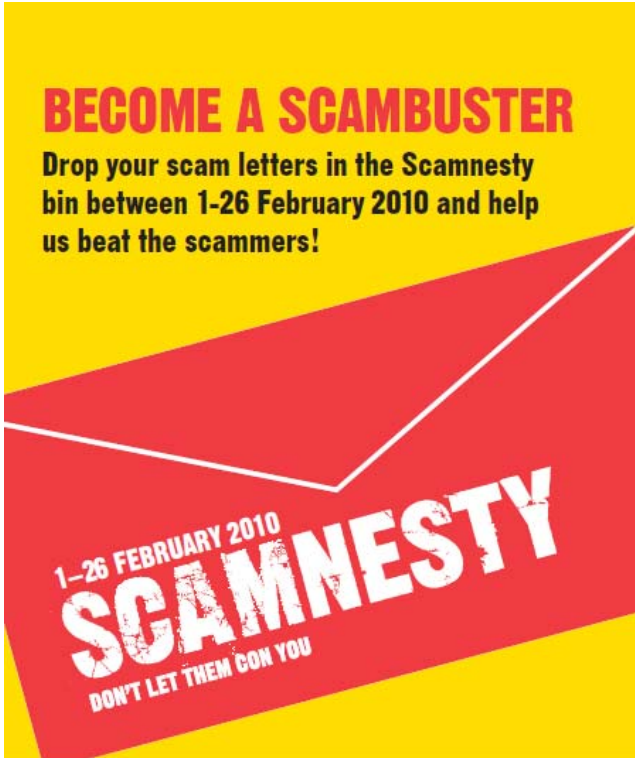


OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

A version for MPs and wider organisations, for example, Age Concern and Citizens Advice, was also produced.

The campaign materials below were available to order from the OFT's mailing house.

### Posters



Supported by local authority Trading Standards Services and the Office of Fair Trading

You can drop off your scam letters at:

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Supported by local authority Trading Standards Services and the Office of Fair Trading

For more information visit [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scamnesty](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scamnesty)

Your local Trading Standards contact is:

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### Scamnesty bin stickers



## Consumer information booklets



OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING



OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

Product code: OFT831

Product code: OFT831w (Welsh)

These booklets contain information about common scams, provide advice on protecting yourself, and where to report scams and get further advice.

## Online promotional banners

Web banners were provided to TSS and wider organisations to direct visitors from their websites to the campaign microsite.



Web banners were used in pay per click advertising to direct visitors to the Scamnesty microsite.

