

CONSUMER RIGHTS |

There was a time when you only had to worry about receiving spam in your e-mail inbox. Years on, though, that role seems to have been taken over by the messages folder on your phone. From opportunities about buying land at 'remarkable

When asked where they get these numbers from, he replies "This is our business. Also, if we provide a good amount of money, then any operator will give us their numbers!" he says in a very confident tone.

Operators, however, have denied the

banks, and chain shops for various reasons. This could be a source of the numbers used in promotional SMSs," says Kamal.

"Again, a client can request Grameenphone to send location-based promotional SMSs to a specific area. But in that case, the client will need to send the SMS content and location information to Grameenphone representatives for screening. After that, Grameenphone evaluates and vets the SMS content. SMS content can be rejected if deemed inappropriate and/or objectionable or for any means not acceptable," he states. "Grameenphone then identifies the total list of mobile numbers for the requested location and takes the clients' consent to send out the

After that, the customer will not get any promotional SMS from GP.

In a similar vein, Robi also denies the allegation and says that the company does not disclose any confidential information of its users.

A glance at the records of MIM SMS, another organisation that deals with bulk SMS, explains the kind of access that these groups have.

"We have our team members who collect these numbers. We have 700 numbers from Gulshan Club, 1,896 numbers from Uttara Club, 7,211 numbers from Banani Club, and 5,314 numbers under the fitness and beauty category," says the Managing Director of the company, Mohammad Masum.

"In our mobile number database, we

HOW DID THEY GET MY NUMBER?

NILIMA JAHAN

rates'—despite the fact that you're struggling to make ends meet—to getting your lift repaired or even joining the 'best' coaching centre, these marketing messages can prove to be quite a nuisance.

So how is it that these organisations get your numbers in the first place? Do you just hand them over? Or are there organisations that work on hunting down mobile numbers based on their needs? Well, truth be told, both factors play a role in it. These unsolicited text messages come from both your operators and from third parties. While the unwanted messages from your own operator can be dealt with, it's the messages from third parties that are a lot more difficult to halt.

In a bid to understand how these third parties collect numbers and send messages in bulk and their capability, *Star Weekend* spoke to a number of such organisations in the guise of buying bulk messages and contact numbers. Based on the investigation, it's quite clear that the third parties have plenty of specifics which about us we may not want to be out there.

Most of these collect numbers from clubs and associations which have contact details of their members. There are also groups who buy flexi-registers on a regular basis. Place the details on the register on an Excel sheet and you can, in a matter of minutes, find out the spending capability of each user.

Bulk SMS BD claims that the company has contact numbers of nearly one lakh 'high profile' users from Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani, and Uttara. They have also divided these into specific categories, such as business proprietors, fitness studios and beauty parlours, clubs, and much more.

"We can give you all the support you need for a fee. You can get a discount the next time you buy something from us. All you need to do is give me your company details, and make sure that you won't use the numbers for any illegal purpose," an employee from the company says.



ILLUSTRATION: PRITHI KHALIQUE

Although we live in the world of social media today with plenty of details available online, a contact number is a lot more personal and it's not a comfortable feeling when you know that your own number is being sold out in public for the sake of marketing. As such, the important question that arises here is whether this is legal. And also, is there any regulation from the side of the government?

claims. Sayed Talat Kamal, head of communications at Grameenphone Ltd. says that as a customer-centric organisation, GP never shares its customers' mobile numbers with anyone. "Customers share their phone numbers with various enterprises/businesses like super shops,

SMS," he adds.

According to GP, as per the telecommunication license, operators can send SMS to its subscribers. But, any customer who doesn't want to get promotional SMS can add his/her number to the DND (Do Not Disturb) list by calling the customer care hotline.

have contacts of 10,484 businessmen, 19,452 doctors from the Bangladesh Medical Association, 18,000 card holders, 63,000 corporate people, 24,760 flat owners, 20,472 people who are categorised in the 'high finance group', 30,645 numbers from the mid to top level category... the list goes on. The prices that you have to pay are provided with the categories," he adds.

Judging by the categories of the numbers, it's quite understandable how these groups target crucial sources in order to obtain these numbers. For instance, the numbers from the Bangladesh Medical Association or the High Finance Group, could have easily been taken from an annual report or a brochure.

Ekushey IT goes a step further and provides numbers based on location. "If you target a specific area, you need to

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