

## Case study

### Auto Trader's Telesafe™ cuts out the canvassers with Invomo's marketing numbers

'Telesafe™ is a world first system to protect online sellers from unwanted sales calls. We had an idea for the service which Invomo translated into a creative call application, helping us overcome technical and legislative challenges. Invomo also ensured that the system is simple to use, a critical factor in its ultimate success. With over 4 million unique users, vehicles sell fast on our website which can be a cause of frustration when buyers ring to find that a vehicle is no longer available. Telesafe™ enables advertisers to delete their adverts easily from their phone when a vehicle is sold - preventing unwanted calls and ensuring only available cars are displayed on [www.autotrader.co.uk](http://www.autotrader.co.uk).'

*James Bromley, Business Development Director, Auto Trader*



Launched in 1996, [www.autotrader.co.uk](http://www.autotrader.co.uk) has become Britain's busiest, most popular and profitable automotive website, selling bikes, caravans, plant and trucks as well as cars. It has a 39 per cent share of the online classified market (*Source: Hitwise, 2006*) and 6,871,572 unique users per month conducting 68,499,801 searches. Auto Trader is part of the Trader Media Group, which employs around 3,500 people at 35 locations across the UK and Ireland.

#### Challenge

A challenge faced by companies providing markets to buy and sell high value items such as vehicles is how to combat canvassers. Canvassers often present themselves as legitimate businesses and contact advertisers offering to sell their vehicle in return for an upfront fee; invariably without a real ability to sell the vehicle. Auto Trader, as the UK's flagship media brand for the motoring sector, took the lead to tackle this issue.

#### Resolution

Telesafe™ enables Auto Trader's customers to replace their private numbers with a marketing number provided by Invomo. Calls come through Invomo's exchange enabling the company to scan calling line identification information – even if the withheld number facility is used. Calls are cross-referenced against a database of known canvassers' numbers in a fraction of a second. If the call is from a canvasser, it's connected to Auto Trader's help desk while legitimate leads are connected to the advertiser's private number.

#### Business value

Telesafe's headline statistics are impressive: when it was launched, a list of 140 known canvassers were barred from calling customers. This figure has now increased to 220, Auto Trader estimates that more than 36,000 nuisance calls were blocked in the first two months of operation. Moreover, customers are no longer bothered by SMS marketing companies who used mobile contact details included in adverts to send Auto Trader's customers unwanted texts. Telesafe demonstrates Auto Trader's commitment to its 'duty of care' to customers; a focus that's inline with its brand reputation as the Internet's number one motoring property website.



## Combating canvassers

Canvassing companies generally contact car sellers by telephone, after seeing their adverts in Auto Trader or online at [www.autotrader.co.uk](http://www.autotrader.co.uk). These companies then phone the seller to try to persuade the car seller to advertise with them for a fixed fee. They often promise that they've a number of buyers on their database who are waiting to buy their car. According to research from Auto Trader in 2006, a staggering 76 per cent of the nation received canvassing calls from companies claiming to sell their car for a fee. The results show that one in six UK motorists received calls from more than five separate canvassing companies when selling a car privately.

Says James Bromley: 'Although canvassers are not an issue unique to Auto Trader, we take our duty of care to customers very seriously and have been looking for some time to clamp down on this activity. We also recognised that advances in technology within telephone exchanges provide the necessary capabilities to root out problem callers and prevent them from preying on our customers.'

Seeking to build a system to weed out the canvassers, Auto Trader put the project out to tender.

## Creativity and confidence

After reviewing a number of telecoms operators, Auto Trader selected Invomo. 'From a technical point of view, tackling canvassers requires the ability to be creative,' says James Bromley. 'Invomo showed a "can do" attitude that's necessary for a project which charts new territory. And coupled with innovative thinking backed by sophisticated systems, this swung the tender in their favour.' Invomo recommended a system that combines several individual telecoms services packaged within a single application to automatically check callers.

## High quality service

The Telesafe service works by offering customers placing adverts through [www.autotrader.co.uk](http://www.autotrader.co.uk), the ability to have their telephone number replaced by a marketing number in their advert, directed to the seller at no extra cost.

The numbers are provided, hosted and routed by Invomo. So when calls come into its exchange, their identification data is analysed against a database of known canvassing offenders. The process takes a fraction of a second. Should a problem be spotted, the call is forwarded to Auto Trader's help desk. Alternatively, valid calls are routed to the advertiser's mobile and landline numbers. The application's speed in vetting callers is a critical factor in ensuring a strong customer experience – there are no noticeable delays when numbers are being connected.

'The beauty of Telesafe is that it's very simple' says James Bromley. 'Customers simply opt to have their



private details replaced by a marketing number free of any charge. The application connects legitimate callers to advertisers' private lines while barring canvassers who, on being put through to our agents, invariably hang up. The system also enables people to withdraw their numbers at the touch of a button once a car is sold.'

## Cost, efficiency and results

With all systems residing in Invomo's carrier-grade network facility, which is monitored 24/7, the application is very robust.

By hosting the application with Invomo, Auto Trader hasn't needed to invest capital in equipment and supporting resources, ensuring that the systems are cost-efficiently provisioned. In the first four months of operation, an average of 9,000 calls per month from canvassers were blocked. Also, the database of blacklisted numbers has been expanded from an original 140 to include 220 individuals and companies to further protect customers.

Concludes James Bromley, 'As with any complex project there were challenges. But with Invomo we were able to brainstorm issues to ensure problems were ironed out. Together, we produced a creative solution to a challenging problem. The results are impressive: we receive a steady stream of correspondence from our customers who're happy with the service and we're leading the industry in the drive to negate the activities of canvassers. We couldn't have contemplated this project without the critical support of Invomo and the success of Telesafe complements our reputation as the number one for buying or selling cars.'

Invomo is an independent supplier of communication services that rejects the traditional telecoms sales approach of maximising traffic and volumes, instead taking a fresh approach and focusing on understanding customers' market dynamics and solving their business challenges. We are a public electronic communications network, regulated by Ofcom that supplies an extensive range of hosted services to improve its customers' communication with their customers. Invomo are highly experienced in generating revenue from telecoms; whether it's enhancing the way your company interfaces with the outside world, converting more calls to business, reducing operational overheads, or increasing revenue through engaging campaigns.

**Invomo Limited**  
130 City Road  
London EC1V 2NW

phone +44 (0)844 88 88 500  
fax +44 (0)844 88 88 600  
email [info@invomo.com](mailto:info@invomo.com)  
[www.invomo.com](http://www.invomo.com)

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