

THE TRUTH BEHIND TRUECALLER

Category: Commercial Law, Privacy Law, Infosec, and POPIA
written by Yashoda Rajoo | October 10, 2017



Truecaller is a global telephone directory and reverse directory that has caller ID, social media integration and call-blocking functionality. It lets you search for contact information, identify incoming calls, and block calls you don't want to receive.

Most smartphone users use the Application ("**App**") to trace and block spam calls, but have you ever wondered how the App has access to all these names and numbers in the first place. The app is available in all countries because Truecaller uses crowdsourced data (data collected from public users) which allows it to work in places where public data is unavailable such as the UK, India and SA. In order to use the App, you have to download it and allow it access to your entire list of contacts in your phonebook. As part of the user agreement, the Truecaller app asks you to allow it access to your address book/contacts on your smart phone. This data is then uploaded by the App to the company's servers. After going through several data matching/refining algorithms, this data is made available to all Truecaller users. So, if even one person that has your name and number stored on their phone uses the Truecaller app, your contact number and name would end up in the Truecaller database. This allows anyone to search your number.

It gets scarier when you look at their Privacy Policy which states that:

"When You install and use the Services, Truecaller will collect personal information from You and any devices You may use in Your interaction with our Services. This information may include e.g.: geo-location; Your IP address; device ID or unique identifier; device manufacturer and type; device and hardware settings; SIM card usage; applications installed on your device; ID for advertising; ad data, operating system; web browser; operator; IMSI; connection information; screen resolution; usage statistics; default communication applications; access to device address book; device log and event information; logs, keywords and meta data of incoming and outgoing calls and messages; version of the Services You use and other information based on Your interaction with our Services such as how the Services are being accessed (via another service, web site or a search engine); the pages You visit and features you use on the Services; the services and websites You engage with from the Services; content viewed by You, content You have commented on or sent to us and information about the ads You see and/or engage with; the search terms You use; order information and other usage activity and data logged by Truecaller's servers from time to time.

We may use any of the information collected, as set out above, to provide You with location and interest based advertising, marketing messaging, information and services. We may also use the collected information to measure the performance of our advertising and marketing services."

Based on the above, whilst Truecaller allows you to search phone numbers and block spammers, the privacy and information security risks don't seem worth the benefits the App brings. However, merely deleting the app will not remove your number from the database. You have to go to www.truecaller.com/unlisting and unlist your number. This will remove it from the database and delete all previous records of your number.