

Death of telemarketing?

The new US-wide 'do-not-call' list continues to live up to the wildest dreams of lawmakers - and the worst nightmares of telemarketers.

Two weeks ago, registration began online and by telephone in states west of Mississippi. Within a few days over 12.5 million phone numbers had been added, with an astonishing 158 phone numbers a second sign up on the first evening. Around 85% of numbers were registered via the website.

"This is really a phenomenal response," beamed Eileen Harrington, director of marketing practices at the Federal Trade Commission. "There is an enormous enthusiasm and pent-up demand for this service."

The news will heighten fears of telemarketers that the scheme will ruin their business. Both the Direct Marketing Association and the American Teleservices Association are pursuing lawsuits against the FTC.

Launching the register, president George Bush declared: "Unwanted telemarketing calls are intrusive, they are annoying, and they're all too common. We're taking practical action to address this problem."

The FTC believes as many as 60 million numbers will be added in the first 12 months. Thirteen states, accounting for 8.1m numbers, plan to transfer their existing do-not-call lists to the national scheme.

Telemarketers must begin removing numbers on the register from their call lists from October 1, with each breach incurring a fine of up to \$11 000 (€9 622; £6 672). The FTC estimates that the scheme will block around 80% of marketing calls.