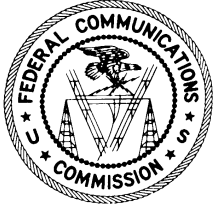


Federal Communications Commission



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554

March 9, 2009

VIA CERTIFIED AND REGULAR MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Virtual Auto Loans, LLC
Attn: Andrew Peters Davis
204 East Petty Lane
Winchester, TN 37398

RE: EB-09-TC-230

Dear Mr. Davis:

This is an official **CITATION**, issued pursuant to section 503(b)(5) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the Act), 47 U.S.C. § 503(b)(5), for violations of the Act and the Federal Communications Commission's rules that govern telephone solicitations and unsolicited advertisements.¹ As explained below, future violations of the Act or Commission's rules in this regard may subject you and your company to monetary forfeitures.

It has come to our attention that your company, acting under your direction, apparently sent one or more unsolicited advertisements to telephone facsimile machines in violation of Section 227(b)(1)(C) of the Communications Act, as described in the attached complaint(s).² Section 227(b)(1)(C) makes it "unlawful for any person within the United States, or any person outside the United States if the recipient is within the United States . . . to use a telephone facsimile machine,

¹ 47 U.S.C. § 227; 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200. A copy of these provisions is enclosed for your convenience. Section 227 was added to the Communications Act by the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 and is most commonly known as the TCPA. The TCPA and the Commission's parallel rules restrict a variety of practices that are associated with telephone solicitation and use of the telephone network to deliver unsolicited advertisements, including fax advertising. 47 U.S.C. § 64.1200(a)(3); *Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 – Junk Fax Protection Act of 2005*, Report and Order and Third Order on Reconsideration, 21 FCC Rcd 3787 (2006) (2006 TCPA Report and Order).

² We have attached one complaint at issue in this citation. The complaint addresses a facsimile advertisement that contains the telephone number 888-291-4690, which your business utilized during the time period at issue.

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computer, or other device to send an unsolicited advertisement to a telephone facsimile machine.”³ As relevant here, an “unsolicited advertisement” is “any material advertising the commercial availability or quality of any property, goods, or services which is transmitted to any person without that person’s prior express invitation or permission.”⁴ Mere distribution or publication of a fax number does not establish consent to receive advertisements by fax.⁵ Fax advertisements may be sent to recipients with whom the sender has an established business relationship, as long as the fax number was provided voluntarily by the recipient.⁶ An established business relationship is defined as a prior or existing relationship formed by a voluntary two-way communication between a person or entity and a business or residential subscriber with or without an exchange of consideration, based on a purchase, inquiry, application or transaction by that subscriber regarding products or services offered by such person or entity. This relationship must not have been previously terminated by either party.⁷ A fax advertisement may be sent to a recipient with whom the sender has an established business relationship only if the sender also:⁸

- (i) obtains the fax number directly from the recipient;⁹ or
- (ii) obtains the fax number from the recipient’s own directory, advertisement, or site on the Internet, unless the recipient has noted on such materials that it does not accept unsolicited advertisements at the fax number in question;¹⁰ or

³ 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C); *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(a)(3) (providing that no person or entity may . . . use a telephone facsimile machine, computer, or other device to send an unsolicited advertisement to a telephone facsimile machine). Both the TCPA and the Commission’s rules define “telephone facsimile machine” as “equipment which has the capacity to transcribe text or images, or both, from paper into an electronic signal and to transmit that signal over a regular telephone line, or to transcribe text or images (or both) from an electronic signal received over a regular telephone line onto paper.” 47 U.S.C. § 227(a)(3); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(f)(11). The Commission has stated that “[t]he TCPA’s definition of ‘telephone facsimile machine’ broadly applies to any equipment that has the capacity to send or receive text or images.” Thus, “faxes sent to personal computers equipped with, or attached to, modems and to computerized fax servers are subject to the TCPA’s prohibition on unsolicited faxes. . . [although] the prohibition does not extend to facsimile messages sent as email over the Internet.” *Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991*, Report and Order, 18 FCC Rcd 14014, 14131-32 (2003) (*2003 TCPA Report and Order*).

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 227(a)(5); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(f)(13) (defining “unsolicited advertisement” to specify that prior express invitation or permission may be “in writing or otherwise”).

⁵ *See Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 10 FCC Rcd 12391, 12408-09 (1995) (*1995 TCPA Reconsideration Order*); *see also 2003 TCPA Report and Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 14128 (concluding that mere publication of a fax number in a trade publication or directory does not demonstrate consent to receive fax advertising).

⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C); 47 C.F.R. 64.1200(a)(3)(ii).

⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 227(a)(2); 47 C.F.R. 64.1200(f)(5); *see also 2006 TCPA Report and Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 3797-3799. An inquiry about a store location or merely visiting a company website does not create an established business relationship; an inquiry must seek information about the products or services offered by the company. Once established, nonetheless, a business relationship will permit an entity to send facsimile advertisements until the recipient “terminates” the relationship by making a request not to receive future faxes. *2006 TCPA Report and Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 3798.

⁸ If a valid EBR existed between the fax sender and recipient prior to July 9, 2005, and the sender also possessed the facsimile number prior to July 9, 2005, the sender may send the facsimile advertisements to that recipient without demonstrating how the number was obtained or verifying it was provided voluntarily by the recipient. 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C)(iii); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 (a)(ii)(C); *see also 2006 TCPA Report and Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 3796.

⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C)(ii)(I); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 (a)(ii)(A).

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(iii) has taken reasonable steps to verify that the recipient agreed to make the number available for public distribution, if obtained from a directory or other source of information compiled by a third party.¹¹

Finally, in the event of a complaint or dispute, the burden rests with the fax sender to demonstrate that it either obtained prior express permission to send the facsimile advertisement or satisfied all the criteria necessary to invoke the established business relationship exemption.¹²

If, after receipt of this citation, you or your company violate the Communications Act or the Commission's rules in any manner described herein, the Commission may impose monetary forfeitures not to exceed \$11,000 for each such violation or each day of a continuing violation occurring before September 2, 2008, and \$16,000 for each such violation or each day of a continuing violation occurring on or after September 2, 2008.¹³

You may respond to this citation within thirty (30) days from the date of this letter either through (1) a personal interview at the Commission's Field Office nearest to your place of business, (2) a written statement, or (3) a teleconference interview with the Commission's Telecommunications Consumers Division in Washington, DC. Your response should specify the actions that you are taking to ensure that you do not violate the Commission's rules governing telephone solicitation and unsolicited advertisements, as described above.

Please contact Delores Browder at (202) 418-2861 to arrange for an interview at the closest field office, if you wish to schedule a personal interview. You should schedule any interview to take place within thirty (30) days of the date of this letter. You should send any written statement within thirty (30) days of the date of this letter to:

Kurt A. Schroeder
Deputy Chief
Telecommunications Consumers Division
Enforcement Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445-12th Street, S.W., Rm. 4-C222
Washington, D.C. 20554

Reference EB-09-TC-230 when corresponding with the Commission.

¹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C)(ii)(II); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 (a)(ii)(B).

¹¹ 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(C)(ii)(II); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 (a)(ii)(B); *see also* 2006 TCPA Report and Order, 21 FCC Rcd at 3795 (“[I]f the sender obtains the number from sources of information compiled by third parties—*e.g.*, membership directories, commercial databases, or internet listings—the sender must take reasonable steps to verify that the recipient consented to have the number listed, such as calling or emailing the recipient.”).

¹² 2006 TCPA Report and Order, 21 FCC Rcd at 3793-9, 3795, 3812.

¹³ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 1.80(b)(3); *Amendment of Section 1.80 of the Commission's Rules and Adjustment of Forfeiture Maxima to Reflect Inflation*, 15 FCC Rcd 18221 (2000) (forfeiture maximum set at \$11,000 for violators who are not common carriers or other entities specifically designated in section 503 of the Act); *Amendment of Section 1.80(b) of the Commission's Rules and Adjustment of Forfeiture Maxima to Reflect Inflation*, 19 FCC Rcd 10945 (2004) (amendment of section 1.80(b) to reflect inflation left the forfeiture maximum for this type of violator at \$11,000); *Amendment of Section 1.80(b) of the Commission's Rules, Adjustment of Forfeiture Maxima to Reflect Inflation*, FCC 08-154, rel. June 13, 2008 (amendment of section 1.80(b) to reflect inflation increased the forfeiture maximum for this type of violator to \$16,000, effective September 2, 2008).

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Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Include a description of the accommodation you will need including as much detail as you can. Also include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Please allow at least 5 days advance notice; last minute requests will be accepted, but may be impossible to fill. Send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau:

For sign language interpreters, CART, and other reasonable accommodations:
202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (tty);

For accessible format materials (braille, large print, electronic files, and audio format): 202-418-0531 (voice), 202-418-7365 (tty).

Under the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(e)(3), we are informing you that the Commission's staff will use all relevant material information before it, including information that you disclose in your interview or written statement, to determine what, if any, enforcement action is required to ensure your compliance with the Communications Act and the Commission's rules.

The knowing and willful making of any false statement, or the concealment of any material fact, in reply to this citation is punishable by fine or imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 1001.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kurt A. Schroeder
Deputy Chief, Telecommunications Consumers Division
Enforcement Bureau
Federal Communications Commission

Enclosures