

Direct marketing – ethical issues

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



When certain consumer-direct channels (CD) are used to reach out to consumers and deliver the goods to them, the marketing practice is termed as direct marketing. The various ways of direct marketing involve reaching the consumer through direct mail, catalogues or telemarketing. In most situations, marketers and consumers have a symbiotic existence in this type of marketing with marketers having the benefit of increasing consumer awareness and consumers getting information about the various products available in the market. However, there are times when this interdependence goes awry and direct marketing crosses over the line to become unethical.[1]

(a) Irritation - telemarketing can become extremely intrusive when marketers do not keep in mind the time of call. Also, when the consumers have to confront poorly trained callers or computerized calls, it becomes irritating. An example can be aggressive telemarketing by cellular service providers.

(b) Unfair practices - Vulnerable consumer groups like children, adolescents and the elderly are often targeted as they are easy to influence. Similarly, impulsive and less sophisticated buyers are often lured by unethical marketing practices.

(c) Deception and fraud - exaggeration of product size, desirable characteristics, misleading statistics, and claims of excellent performance are the most common among unethical marketing practices. Product prices are also quoted with some latent prices so that they give an impression of being less.

(d) Invasion of privacy – company databases are composed of data collected when consumers indulge in non-buying activities such as apply for a credit cards, get a magazine subscription or even send an email. Thus marketers seem to have a lot of unethical information on consumers' personal lives and this information can be used to an unfair advantage.

However, in present times, marketers have also become aware that these unethical practices if followed will only lead to a disadvantage. They may even lead to negative consumer attitudes about the advertised products, lower response rate, wasteful expenditure on untargeted marketing and may also lead higher legislative control on advertising at some point of time in the future. Thus, direct marketers are now moving towards honest and well targeted marketing that is not only cost effective but also efficient as it focuses only on consumer segments that are interested in learning about the product being advertised.