



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Press Release

For immediate release

Date: 20 June 2008

Company convicted of obtaining BT customer information unlawfully

Two private investigators have today pleaded guilty to obtaining and selling personal information after illegally 'blagging' the personal details of a customer from BT, following a successful prosecution by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Christopher Hackett, trading as Swift Investigations, and Darren Whalley of Managed Credit Services Ltd (MCS Ltd) were convicted of unlawfully obtaining and selling personal information at Wimbledon Magistrates' Court and fined £400 and £500 respectively. Both were also ordered to pay £400 towards prosecution costs.

Hackett contacted BT to 'blag' the personal information of a woman in an attempt to trace her partner, who owed money to Blackhorse Finance Ltd. Blackhorse had instructed a private investigator to track the man, believing that any information would be gathered legally. However, the private investigator contracted Darren Whalley to carry out the work and he passed the job on to Christopher Hackett.

The ICO was contacted by BT following a suspicious telephone call to their call centre made by a man claiming to be a BT employee. The caller deceived the true member of staff into disclosing personal information about the debtor's partner. By illegally 'blagging' information from BT, Hackett was able to obtain her address, which led to Blackhorse Finance Ltd visiting her home. It is an offence under Section 55 of the Data Protection Act to

unlawfully obtain, disclose or sell personal information without the consent of the data controller.

Mick Gorrill, Assistant Commissioner at the ICO, said: “Illegally obtaining and selling personal information is a serious offence which can be highly damaging to the individuals concerned. This prosecution is the result of a thorough investigation by the Information Commissioner’s Office and is part of our ongoing work to stop the illegal trade in personal information. Individuals must be confident that their personal information is stored securely by those organisations which hold and process it.”

ENDS

If you need more information, please contact the Information Commissioner’s press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
2. For more information about the Information Commissioner’s Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
3. The ICO reports on the illegal trade in personal information, ‘What price privacy?’ and ‘What Price Privacy Now?’ are available on the [ICO website](#)
4. Earlier this year the Department for Constitutional Affairs announced its intention to introduce a custodial sentence for those convicted of offences under Section 55
5. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - Fairly and lawfully processed
 - Processed for limited purposes
 - Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - Accurate and up to date
 - Not kept for longer than is necessary
 - Processed in line with your rights
 - Secure
 - Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection