

Customer data used for unwanted romantic contact, UK poll shows

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Almost one in three people aged 18-34 have received unwanted romantic contact after giving their personal information to a business, a UK poll has shown. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has called for recipients of such texts to come forward to help the regulator gather evidence of the impact of this phenomenon. The texts are sent by individuals who use personal information such as a phone number or email address that they have accessed through a business context to push for a romantic proposition. Research by the ICO revealed that almost a third of 18- to 34-year-olds had been victims of this practice. It also showed that 66% of the public believed it was morally wrong to use personal details given for business purposes to contact someone out of a business context. The ICO will contact some of the largest customer-facing employers in the country to remind them that unauthorised use of personal information is illegal. This comes after a 23-year-old airline passenger, Hannah Smethurst, received an unsolicited WhatsApp message from a contractor working for Etihad Airways, who had accessed her number through the airline's system, as she was waiting to board a flight. Smethurst described the experience as "terrifying" and said it made her feel "really vulnerable". Etihad said its team launched an investigation after speaking to Smethurst and establishing that there had been "inappropriate conduct by an employee of a third-party contractor". Emily Keaney, the deputy commissioner of regulatory policy at the ICO, said: "People have the right to order a pizza or give their email for a receipt or have shopping delivered without then being asked for sex or a date a little while later. They have a right to know that when they hand over their personal information that it will not then be used in ways that they would not be comfortable with. "If you are running a customer-facing business, you have a responsibility to protect the data of your customers, including from your employees misusing it." The ICO has an online form for people who want to report an experience of unwanted contact.