



Mutare Voice Spam Filter

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Host: Doug Green, Publisher, Telecom Reseller

Guests: Chuck French, CGO, Mutare and Aaron Foss, CEO, Nomorobo

Transcribed using Mutare Voice giSTT Speech to Text and edited for clarity.

Doug: This is Doug Green and I'm the publisher of Telecom reseller and this is a special podcast on the vital issue of robocalls and how to prevent robocalls and today we are talking to Chuck French of Mutare and Aaron Foss of Nomorobo.

Chuck and Aaron, thank you for joining me today.

Chuck: Thanks for having us Doug.

Aaron: Yeah, absolutely.

Doug: So, I think a lot of our readers are familiar with Mutare. But Chuck could you just tell us real quick what is Mutare and how did Mutare get into the issue of robocall spam filtering?

Chuck: Yeah, absolutely Doug. So yes, we have been in the UC space for many years. We are a 30-year-old company. Most people know us for our flagship product which we now call Mutare Voice, which is effectively a 21st century voicemail solution. We are also well known for our speech to text, but in everything that we do, we're a bit of perpetual start up Doug in the sense that we like to constantly develop new functions and features on all of our products to make the telephone system and voicemail more relevant.

We had been tracking the issue of robocalls for many years and had certainly heard of it as an issue with our clients and that set us off on a mission to begin addressing the problem. And not in any prescriptive way, really just listening and learning how other people were trying to address it. At a certain point, about 12 months ago, we decided that we were going to be what we think is the first viable enterprise solution to combat this prevalent issue.

So that's how we discovered it, just by listening, which is what we are really good at. And of course, building technology in a rapid way that can be delivered to the enterprise and supported by enterprise, and that's where we've built our reputation.

Doug: And Aaron, what is Nomorobo?

Aaron: Sure, so we have really humble beginnings. So, I am a serial entrepreneur that's always on the lookout for solving big problems. A couple years back, back in 2013 my last company had just been acquired by Groupon, so I was taking some time off and the FTC had what was called the robocall challenge. They basically said, "We are looking for somebody in general outside of telecom to stop the robocalls." They had been trying for decades and it was, not only was the problem not getting better, it was actually getting worse. And because I didn't have the telecom knowledge, I'm not a UC insider, I'm just kind of a guy who likes to solve problems - I was able to come up with a very unique way of stopping the robocalls. And so, they picked

Nomorobo as the winner of the competition and then I kind of took the ball and ran with it. We are now a team of eight people and we are 100% focused on stopping robocalls. Just about two months ago, we hit the one billionth robocall blocked. We are available on all of the major VoIP carriers in the United States. So, AT&T, Verizon, Comcast, Charter. We have a top ranked APP on the Apple and Android store and this is basically the one thing that we do. We are the best in the business at stopping robocalls and again mainly on the residential side. And then when the folks at Mutare reached out and said, "Hey you know, enterprise has this giant robocall problem also - can we use the database?" It was just kind of like peanut butter and chocolate over there, it just made so much sense which is why I am so excited to see the future and being able to solve this giant problem for enterprises.

Doug: Aaron, I understand that you've actually testified in front of Congress on this issue.

Aaron: Yeah, I've actually been in front of Congress, both houses three times actually. It started with the Senate, then it was the House and then just back in March I did another testimony in front of the House also.

Doug: And how did this issue escalate to the point of that it's now such a public concern, it's a federal concern and a Congressional concern?

Aaron: Yeah, you know, it's funny also to look back in history. So, it was 2013 when I was in front of the Senate. It was just after I had won the robocall challenge and the entire industry was against this. Right, the lobbying organizations, the carriers. Everybody was saying you know the technology isn't going to work, there's no way to stop this problem. They're actually not even allowed to block or throttle or choke any calls. But the FCC regulations prohibits carriers from doing that and then there's me who is saying, "Well you know I've got technology and I think it can be done." Fast forward a couple years later and I advocated in front of the FCC to let them clarify and they came out with rulings and said no you know new carriers can do this if they want. After that happened, everything kind of started thawing out and then the last time when I was there just a few months ago, the conversation changed from Robocalling is never going to work, it's not going to, it's gonna be dangerous, to no no, we get it, it works. Now how can we do more of it? Right all the representatives are saying what are the laws we can make that will allow the carriers to do more to stop this call. Nomorobo and the other companies now that are in this industry have proven that it works. Now how can we roll it out more so it really has been a complete 180 from "no no no this isn't going to work we can't do it" to now everybody is like "This is working, this is great, how do we do more of it?"

Doug: So, you know Aaron when you say that, it's almost reminiscent of the Carter Phone Decision - 1968 long time ago. But at the very dawn of the deregulation of the telecommunications industry and the argument was "Hey you can't fiddle with our network" and you're saying basically when you were presenting several years ago, an option, everybody was saying "hey you can't do that".

Aaron: That's exactly right. The thought from the telecom folks of not being in control of the network - since the dawn of time, has always been a big problem and it's kind of where we got to right now right when it was a closed system, when there was Ma Bell, when it was AT&T when you could trust everybody that was plugged into the system and even down to the handset level exactly you had to buy a phone from the phone company, you didn't have to verify the caller ID, right? Nowadays though because that flaw has existed since day one, you can set the phone number to be anything. You can spoof anything that you want, and that has literally brought us to where we are right now. This is why this problem is just such an epidemic.

Doug: You know maybe we should also define something. It occurs to me that there's a big difference between let's say traditional cold calling. Where a salesman is just simply calling people sort of blind but one after another and he's doing it physically vs. robocalling. What's the difference?

Aaron: Doug, you've opened up a Pandora's box here because everybody has different definitions. Everybody just you know, it's like that Supreme Court ruling about obscenity, right? I'll know it when I see it. Officially a robocall - if you go back to the TCPA you know, it's made with the automated dialer; a lot of people think it just has to have a pre-recorded message at the end. So, with the fake IRS scam, it's Agent Jones and they are coming to arrest you. You know in my world robocall is a catch-all for any kind of call that is usually dial-automated that is trying to scam you out of something - even like those boiler room guys who, they might be, you know smiling and dialing and picking up the phone, you know, can I speak to the lady of the house? I got a great stock tip on you. Is that officially a robocall? No. But do we still need to protect people from it? Absolutely. I think one of the important things that most people don't realize when it comes to robocalls, especially on the enterprise side, is that B2B robocalls are legal. There is a carveout, obviously for political ones. Everyone knows that...surveys, charities, but it is not illegal to robocall a business or cold call a business and try and sell them something which is pretty ridiculous right? Why don't enterprises have the same protections that individuals have?

Doug: It sounds to me like a regulatory approach is going to be very difficult to even articulate, let alone impose. And therefore, we may need to be looking at technology.

Aaron: Legislation is always going to trail technology. Let's call a spade a spade here. The robocallers are winning. Their technology - the same reason that we have free local and long distance - and you know we can watch a video while we're you know in the passenger seat of the car driving down - like this is unheard of - I'm 41 right but I was always playing around on BBS and you know the 144 modem and things and like if you were to tell me it occurred to me a couple of months ago that I was gonna to be sitting on a train heading down to DC and I was going to have a computer in my lap that had a high speed internet connection, I wouldn't even believe you. Like that's absolutely crazy so right where we've come right now and look the politicians want to do everybody is trying to do what they can and they obviously have constituents everybody says is the number one problem that they have but you are exactly right, we need that, we need the legislatures to do what they do. We need the regulators to do what they do. But ultimately, we need the technologists, we need the Nomorobos, the Mutares of the world to fight this kind of call it the last mile or maybe even the last inch, right? These calls are gonna get through on the network. But stopping them before they are ringing on your desk, or ringing on your phone, or ringing in your home, that's ultimately going to be, and because technology can move orders of magnitude faster than regulation and legislation. If we see a new pattern that is popping up, our algorithm detects it and boom we are protecting people from it. The thought of getting a bill through and it could take years and by that point those robocallers have moved onto a new scam.

Doug: Because they can read the legislation and adjust accordingly.

Aaron: And that's exactly it and once you make the rules then everyone's gonna go around and hack it. You even just mentioned it, right? Like what is a robocall? Cause it again, the call originated is the legitimate robocallers are you know to the letter of the law. You know we have a preexisting business relationship, or you know we are not using an automated dialer, we are not using a pre-recorded message. There's another interesting one now to get around some of

these rules allegedly. Most of the legitimate telemarketers aren't using it, but it's called an avatar dialer with you ever picked up the phone and it sounds like a person. They usually have a southern accent, or they'll say something like "Oh just got to adjust my headset. Give me one second" but all that is a soundboard so the call center is usually overseas but they've learned that like when you pick up the phone and you hear that silence, and then you see of the call center noise in the background and you hear a foreign accent boom you hang up. So now instead of that they have a soundboard and the button says Intro and it says Hello and it sounds down home and then so there's a real person on the other end just controlling the sound board the conversion rates for that I'm guessing have gone through the roof because there's so many more avatar robocalls that are coming out and its really confusing to people. Even they have an answer like, if you ask the avatar "Are you a robot?" there's a button that says, no I am not a robot, I am a real person. Well, is that true? I mean the recording is of a real person and the person who is controlling it is a real person, the person on the other end is a real person. So, I guess they're real person? No. That doesn't make any sense.

Doug: Alright, so now given that I guess human vice is a constant and vice's ambitions are constant and their ability to use technology are also constant, What's the enterprise to do? Why don't we dive a little bit deeper into what you at Nomorobo are trying to do?

Aaron: Yeah, absolutely and this is really where I think that the future is going. We can't get into every enterprise. We are on the residential side. We are great at figuring out which numbers are robocallers. We're actually, our full databases are over 1.7 million known robocallers and we are adding 1,500 new numbers a day and that's on top of the heuristics one, things like a neighbor spoof and where you see if the same area code and exchange. But partnering with companies like Mutare who have just such a deep history and experience in enterprise. We do what we are doing best, they do what they are doing best, and the biggest beneficiary is everybody who's sitting behind their desk and not getting these kinds of robocalls.

Doug: So, Chuck, why is it important for enterprises to block calls at the edge of the network versus that the carriers we were discussing earlier?

Chuck: Sure, Doug and blocking calls in general is the goal here. They're all digital distractions in the enterprise. They mentally reduce productivity; they make employees unhappy when they are distracted. But also, there are security issues related to that as well. A lot of the rules and regulations we're starting to see would perhaps give the enterprise some sort of a comfort that "Hey helps on the way" with this idea of being able to validate the call before it comes in. The real issue is that enterprises demand control and they need to have control over what's blocked, what's diverted, and what gets through to their employees. The easiest example would be a hospital or healthcare system. Can you imagine if a hospital were to allow a carrier to determine whether or not the patient is or not calling? That just can't happen. What works for the consumer market isn't going to work in the enterprise. The new regulations will improve our solution going forward, but enterprises really want to block not the calls in their network, but on the edge, because then they can control the rules related to what calls get in. It's not going to be a one size fits all approach. The legal liability of blocking a call at the carrier level will be huge. We designed the Mutare Voice Spam Filter to give enterprises that choice. Whether it be, we'll put patients on a whitelist, we are going to put known people that we don't want to be able to have access to our phone systems on the blacklist, and of course Nomorobo's dynamic list is going to be that choice.

Doug: So, Chuck, when does this become available?

Chuck: Well Doug, its available today, but we're officially making the software generally available on Monday, July 8th and we're looking forward to partnering with the organizations that want to solve this problem, this endemic problem, in their enterprises and look forward to officially introducing it in the marketplace.

Doug: Now is it only available to previous Mutare customers?

Chuck: No, for version one of the software, the only limiting factor is that the enterprise would have to have SIP trunks coming into the organization, which is becoming more and more prevalent, becoming more and more the norm. There are a few companies that are still moving from the old technology to SIP, but interesting enough, I'll just share this the story, as more of an illustration that we're on the right path with this technology, one of our business partners intends to recommend the Mutare Voice Spam Filter as best practices when doing any SIP work with their clients. So, what does that say?

Doug: It says a lot, that's a pretty hefty recommendation.

Chuck: It is.

Doug: Is it available to any type of platform? Cisco? Avaya?

Chuck: We've designed it to be platform agnostic and we talked a bit before that it really does sit on the edge of the telephony system. So, it will work with Avaya, Cisco, Mitel, it really is agnostic to the underlying platform, and the key requirements are obviously the SIP trunks and we basically have to install two virtual servers. One is a proxy server and the other one is the Mutare Voice server, which is the brains of the system where the whitelists and blacklists reside. It's also where we would connect with Nomorobo to do the dynamic blacklisting. That would be all the rules, therein about how we divert calls and triage calls that are suspected Robocallers.

Doug: Is it available directly?

Chuck: Our stated go to market strategy at Mutare is to work with our Business Partners. I would say in general that is how we transact 90% of the time. There are odd cases where an organization does not use a business partner in which case, we will work with them directly.

Doug: So, you'll be able to go through your Avaya business partner and Cisco business partner and so on?

Chuck: Absolutely.

Doug: So, Aaron, as we conclude our podcast today, any closing thoughts?

Aaron: Yeah absolutely. It's really pretty exciting that there are finally solutions to the robocall problem. We all get these calls all the time on the residential side. If you get robocalls on your landline go to nomorobo.com put in your carrier, it will give you instructions on how to set it up. Same deal on your mobile device, go to the app store, either Android or Apple or check it out at nomorobo.com and I'll let Chuck speak to how you can go in and integrate it with Mutare.

Doug: Chuck it's all yours.

Chuck: Yeah, thank you, well If you are an organization that wants to know about your specific robocall problem, and want to learn more, well, first, know that there is a viable enterprise solution. And I want to stress the enterprise side. There are organizations out there that have tried to do this on their own. We've got 30 years of experience building these types of solutions. Over 2000 clients in the Fortune 2000 and up. Come visit with us. We would love to help you address this endemic problem. And you can learn more by going to www.Mutare.com. M-u-t-a-r-e.com. Thank you, Doug.

Doug: Well thank you very much for joining me today. I'm sure we are going to be talking more about this critical and unfolding issue. For now, thank you.