FCC Robocall Summit: Your guide to new SHAKEN/STIR caller verification

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Today, a Robocall Summit hosted by the Federal Communications Commission will serve as a progress report on what major phone carriers are doing to protect you from those incessant robocalls interrupting your life.

All the major carriers will be there, along with other industry professionals. The people in the room all have a role in developing what's called the SHAKEN/STIR standard. But you don't have to attend to get a grasp of how SHAKEN/STIR is going to alert you to robocalls.

This is everything you need to know about SHAKEN/STIR:

What is SHAKEN/STIR, anyway?

SHAKEN/STIR stands for Signature-based Handling of Asserted information using toKENs and the Secure Telephone Identity Revisited. It's a mouthful.

Don't worry, you don't have to remember what it stands for; just know that it's meant to protect you from all these annoying calls.

Basically what SHAKEN/STIR does is verify calls that are coming to your phone. Robocallers have turned to "neighborhood spoofing"—or replicating a number within your area code that looks familiar to you so there's a better chance of picking up the phone. Once you pick up the phone, they know your line is active and, therefore, you are likely to get

more calls.

How does it work?

SHAKEN/STIR will verify with a symbol such as a check mark or a company logo that the person calling you is, indeed, authentic and calling you from the number on your screen. While call verification doesn't block robocalls from reaching your phone, it gives you more information to make a decision to answer the call. It also tracks where the call is originating, identifying potential scammers.

The standard will not be a foolproof solution to robocalls on its own but will help deter them and with a combination of other tools, might put an end to them.

Who is going to get it?

The FCC mandated the major phone carriers uphold this new standard to not only verify the calls within their network but also the calls coming from other networks. Along with other industry professionals, such as robocall blocking technology developers, they are working on ways to limit consumers from receiving robocalls.

All of the providers have signaled their intent to meet the standard to the FCC but also currently provide tools to their customers to block robocalls. Unfortunately, SHAKEN/STIR also requires modern phone systems such as 4G to work, so older landlines will not have the protection.

When can we have this?

The FCC expects providers to have the SHAKEN/STIR standard implemented by the end of the year, and carriers are trying to validate

calls from other networks by October. Effects can be seen now, as most providers offer free services that identify potential robocalls, like T-Mobile's scam likely feature.

Why are they doing this again?

Robocalls are the No. 1 consumer complaint to the FCC. Americans received 4.5 million robocalls per day just in the first half of July, according to the Federal Trade Commission. Robocall software is cheap and easy to operate, making it a simple way to scam people out of thousands of dollars.

Where can I get it?

Unfortunately, SHAKEN/STIR will only work in the U.S. because it is a U.S. solution. Even though a lot of robocall scams do come from outside the country, most illegal telemarketing originates from the U.S.

And the unknown ...

Robocallers have a tendency to adapt to new measures aimed to stop them, says summit attendee Jonathan Nelson, director of product management at robocall blocking software company Hiya, and it is unclear what the future of robocalls might look like.

"We have seen many times over the years that they will innovate in this arms race against spam detection services, and they are certainly planning right now how they're going to behave to try and continue their campaigns," said Nelson. "I'm really hoping during this session we can start that conversation of what do we think will be next? How are they going to move and how can we get ahead of them this time?"

He thinks robocallers might try to get their numbers verified or move

their operations overseas.

Nelson estimates only 30% of potential scam calls will be verified because of the technological and geographical limits but says it will be easier to trace the location of robocallers as more calls are verified. He thinks eventually, crackdown operations on robocallers will go from days and weeks to minutes.

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