REPORT OF THE ADJUDICATOR

Complaint reference number:	17481
WASPA member(s):	Opera Interactive (SP) (0068) Sprint Media (IP) (1168)
Membership number(s):	See above
Complainant:	Public
Type of complaint:	Subscription Service
Date complaint was lodged:	6 June 2012
Date of the alleged offence:	18 November 2011
Relevant version of the Code:	11.6
Clauses considered:	11.3, 11.5 and 11.6.
Relevant version of the Ad. Rules:	N/A
Related cases considered:	17264, 17394 and 17495

Complaint

Complaint 17481 was logged by a competitor regarding a subscription service.

The complaint progressed as follows:

Complaint 17481 is the escalation of unsubscribe request 3115328 regarding subscription services charges.

- The formal complaint was sent to the IP on 2012-06-18 and they responded on 2012-06-26.
- The SP was notified on 2012-06-18.
- The complainant refused resolution on 2012-07-11 and 2012-07-12.
- The SP provided additional information on 2012-07-23.

The Complainant alleges that she had been automatically subscribed to a service. She opted out of the service and received a confirmation message as required by the Code but denies ever subscribing in the first place.

In summary the complaint sets out the following having been breached:

- Automatic subscription; and
- Subscription process not followed.

Service provider's response

The SP referred the complaint to the IP and also responded themselves. Due to the fact that all parties involved are privy to the SP's formal response I am not going to repeat every element thereof here.

The SP alleges that they and the IP complied fully with the Code of Conduct and the requirements that it exacts. In particular, the SP states that:

1. The complainant relates to the Mob Matic service. Subscribers are subscribed via a weblink which was provided to us;
2. The subscription process complies with the Code of Conduct in that before subscribing the complainant was made fully aware, on both landing pages of the service, that what is being offered was a subscription service at a daily charge of R7/per day. Screenshots were attached.
3. On 18 November 2011 the complainant entered their mobile number on the first landing page and clicked send. A pin code was sent to his mobile number. At this point the complainant was not subscribed to anything.
4. On receipt of the pin code the complainant entered the pin code in the relevant space on the second landing page. Only by entering the pin code sent on this second landing page was the complainant subscribed to anything.
5. The subscriber was also sent welcome and reminder messages in line with the Code of Conduct.
6. The SP provided logs to in proof of the above.

Information provider's response

The IP responded in detail by stating that the complainant clicked on a banner advert while browsing the internet and then provided logs in the form of a table setting out dates of subscription, the sending of the welcome messages and the charges deducted. They also provided confirmation reminder messages and of the unsubscription of the complainant from the service.

Complainant's Further Reply

The Complainant responded to the WASP's response to state that they never subscribed to any service.

Sections of the Code considered

11.3. Subscription initiated via a browser (web or WAP)

11.3.1. If a subscription service is initiated by entering a customer's mobile number on a web page or WAP site, then a separate confirmation message must be sent to the customer's mobile handset in order to prove that the number entered matches the customer's mobile handset number. This message may either:
(a) contain a PIN which is then confirmed or validated on the web page, or
(b) contain the name of the service, an explanation of the confirmation process, and a URL with a unique identifier, which, when clicked, validates the handset number.

11.3.2. For any subscription services that are initiated via WAP, it is a requirement for the service provider who has a direct contract with the network operator to display a WAP confirmation page to the potential subscriber. This confirmation page must be displayed after the subscriber has first indicated an interest in the subscription service by clicking on a "join" or similar link.
11.3.3. The WAP confirmation page must display the following information in a clear and easy to read manner:
(a) The name of the service and an indication that it is a subscription service
(b) The price and frequency of billing
(c) A phone number for customer support

11.3.4. Where it is necessary for a consumer to confirm that their MSISDN may be made available to an application, this may be done by including the following wording on the WAP confirmation page:
[Application name] has requested that your mobile number be made available.

11.3.5. The information listed in 11.3.3 and 11.3.4 above must be presented as text and not as an image.

11.3.6. The WAP confirmation page described above must also present a confirmation button. It must be clearly communicated to the customer on the confirmation page that clicking the confirmation button will initiate a subscription service.

11.3.7. The WAP confirmation page may not contain any marketing messages or other content that is likely to distract the customer from the required confirmation information and process.

11.3.8. The WAP confirmation page must offer all languages used in the promotional material for that service.

11.5. Welcome message

11.5.1. Once a customer has subscribed to a subscription service, a notification message must immediately be sent to the customer. This welcome message should not be mistaken for an advert or marketing message. The customer may not be charged for this message.

11.5.2. The welcome message must start with the text "Welcome: " and must also be a clear notification of the following information, in the following order:
(a) The name of the subscription service;

(b) The cost of the subscription service and the frequency of the charges;
(c) Clear and concise instructions for unsubscribing from the service;
(d) The service provider's telephone number.

11.6. Reminder messages

11.6.1. A monthly reminder SMS must be sent to all subscription service customers. This reminder must be sent within 30 days of the initial notification message, and once per calendar month thereafter. The customer may not be charged for these reminder messages.

11.6.2. The reminder messages specified in 11.6.1 must adhere exactly to the following format, flow, wording and spacing:
Reminder: You are subscribed to [name of service provider] [content/service description]. Cost [cost of service and frequency of billing]. SMS HELP [optional keyword] to [short code]/call [call centre number + "(VAS)" if applicable]. To unsub, sms STOP [service keyword] to [short code].
or
Reminder: You are subscribed to [name of service provider] [content/service description]. Cost [cost of service and frequency of billing]. For help call [call centre number + "(VAS)" if applicable]. To unsub, sms STOP [service keyword] to [short code].

11.6.3. The entire reminder message must be sent in a single SMS, may not contain any line breaks or carriage returns and may not include any additional characters other than those specified in 11.6.2.

11.6.4. The content/service description must be text describing the content, promotion or service (e.g. "tones" or "poems"). This text must not be worded in a way that attempts to deceive or mislead the customer from the purpose of the reminder which is to inform the user that they are subscribed to a service.

11.6.5. The cost of service and frequency of billing must use the format "RX/day", "RX/week" or "RX/month" (or RX.XX if the price includes cents). No abbreviations of "day", "week" or "month" may be used.

11.6.6. For services that are not billed on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, the pricing should be of the format "RX every [time period]".

11.6.7. The text "(VAS)" must be included after any VAS-rated phone number. It does not need to be included after phone numbers which are not VAS-rated.

11.6.8. Members must test reminder messages on a range of phones to ensure that all characters and lines are displayed identically 11.3. Subscription initiated via a browser (web or WAP)

Decision

I will now deal with each section of the Code that the Complainant alleged the IP infringed.

Similarly to the response letters from the SP's and IP's in these WAP/web subscription disputes I feel like I am generating rote responses. Unfortunately this is due to the fact that the details of the cases are so similar.

Again, I have a general issue with the practical problems of determining when logs are valid. All too often, the WASP alleges that the Complainant entered their cell phone number into the website to initiate the process and the Complainant denies doing any such thing. Due to the fact that it is possible for anyone to enter any cell phone number into a website, it is very hard to demonstrate whether or not the Complainant actually did the inputting themselves.

However, it is quite clear that the welcome message sent to the consumer and the monthly reminder message do not comply with the requirements of sections 11.5.2 and 11.6.2 of the Code in that they did not comply fully with the required format for such messages as explicitly stated and required by the Code.

Sanctions

I am not going to sanction the SP in this case.

Due to the number of complaints against the IP which are of the same nature I am going to order the IP to:

1. Refund the Complainant any monies deducted; and
2. Impose a fine of R10 000, R5000 payable immediately and R5000 to be held in abeyance pending the IP demonstrating to WASPA that they have corrected their welcome and reminder messages within 7 (seven) days of this ruling being published.