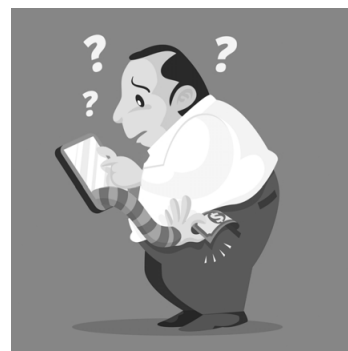


Personal Account

adapted from a column by **Marc Sidwell**

- 1 This week, my mobile phone has been buzzing with strange numbers. Calls from Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea. They ring once, and then the call ends. I block one number, and a new one pops up. This is a scam called wangiri. It originated in Japan, where wangiri means 'one and cut'. Today, these short, mysterious calls are a worldwide epidemic, costing billions of dollars a year.
- 2 Wangiri fraudsters operate on an industrial scale. They use automated dialling machines to work through huge ranges of phone numbers, calling thousands every minute. The scam call is often from an overseas location where the fraudsters' risk of prosecution is low, but its origin may also be masked, so you could receive a call that does not appear as exotic or unlikely as mine from Sierra Leone.
- 3 Every wangiri call ends after only one or two rings. The criminals at the other end then rely on the natural curiosity of their targets. Anyone who rings back to find out who called them will be connected to a premium-rate line on the other side of the world. The fee simply for connecting the call will be high, and someone will then try to keep the caller connected 36, perhaps with a protracted conversation, or by placing them on hold or playing a recorded message. In a worst-case scenario, the scammers will also attempt to steal personal information from those who call back.
- 4 The true cost of the mistake will become apparent to the victims only when their next phone bill arrives, carrying a hefty charge, much of which will make its way to the scammers. Anyone who does call back also risks being added to a 'sucker list' by the criminals. 37, the victim may receive even more wangiri calls.
- 5 Wangiri is not a new scam but it shows no signs of dying out and may be on the rise again. Mobile phone operators are active in the fight against wangiri fraud, but it is hard to tackle at source. If you have been scammed, contact your operator and report suspicious numbers, so they can take steps to block them. You can also try to request a refund of any charges, but be aware that operators do not accept liability for the costs of any calls you make to premium overseas numbers, so you may not succeed. If you start to get odd calls from overseas, or blank voicemails from strange numbers, there is only one way to be safe: don't pick up and whatever you do, 38.



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