

## There Ought to be a Law

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

In early days, the telephone provided a medium for carrying on distant conversations that couldn't be accommodated by yelling. Alexander Graham Bell came up with it, and it served nicely for a century. It evolved through stages of party lines, rotary dialing, digital dialing, long distance direct dialing, answering machines, and other developments that brought us to a peak of convenient and reliable distant communications.

But now we are progressing solidly backwards. Corporations, professional offices, charities, and agencies of government have abandoned easy contact with the public, no longer answering the phone live, but instead with recorded greetings of incomprehensible menus, bad music, and static. Thus, they have bricked up the doors between themselves and their customers.

And from the other end, robots now dial us inconveniently, and incessantly, for commercial, political, and fund-raising purposes, a nuisance even when their goals are legitimate. When motives are criminal, robots dial us randomly to trick us into providing personal financial information or extort our money under false pretenses. Robots mole their way into home and business computers to steal information. You'll recognize those calls, because they disconnect as soon as you, a human, answers.

There ought to be a law, and I happen to have one drafted and ready for a vote...

### **The Telephone Sanity Act of 2017**

*Part A. Automated Greetings and Menus.* An enterprise, charity, or agency may answer telephone calls with an automated system only by complying with the following requirements and exclusions:

- Automated greetings must be spoken by enunciators with plain diction.
- Callers may be presented no more than four menu selections, including an option to be routed directly to a human being without ado.
- A holding loop may never claim “your call is important to us.”
- There shall be no messages in a holding loop extolling virtues of the institution that has you on hold.
- Music-on-hold, if any, shall be selected by a committee of retirees, not by interns in the traffic department.

*Part B. Scripts Prohibited.* Any human whom a customer eventually reaches is prohibited from reading scripts to deal with predictable questions or problems. This includes “have a nice day” when hanging up on an angry caller.

*Part C. Executive Oversight.* Once a month, the chief executive of every enterprise, charity, or government institution, including the United States President, shall dial his or her own organization, incognito, to learn just what in hades happens when a hapless customer or citizen

calls.

*Part D. Robotic Dialing.* This act recognizes there are legitimate uses for robots, such as vacuuming floors or tightening bolts on Cadillacs, but they must be kept in their place. Never shall a robot be asked or permitted to initiate a phone call.

*Part E. Sanctions.* Telephone systems of organizations or agencies in violation of this act are subject to forfeiture, in which case responsible managers will be sent for alternate training in Morse code, semaphores, and smoke signals.