

ICMI 2019 Hiya



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Chris Sorensen, Director of Business Development, Hiya noted that the 3-year old company based in Seattle, WA, with offices in London and Budapest, was spun out of Whitepages.com with the purpose of ensuring that people gain more context into incoming phone calls.

More than ever, calls now come in where individuals don't know the origin - most of which are unwanted. Mobile-based, enabling people to download an app, Hiya is built into Samsung smartphones and works with AT&T on a feature they call "Call Protect. "When a call comes into a customer's device, if we make a note of 'reputation' along that number, we alert them that the call is likely to be fraudulent, scam or a telemarketer," he said. "In addition, we enable enterprises to provide what we call a 'branded call experience,' where customers can see a minimum and, in some cases, their logo and a reason why they are calling."

Hiya has numerous algorithms that sift through billions of call events on a monthly basis. The algorithms take into account copious quantities of call signaling data as well as reports they receive from users informing them of calls with malicious intent.

Chris discussed some of the most diabolical scam call schemes, including the recent phenomena of calls coming in at odd hours from international scammers where the intent is to get consumers to pick up and then bill them for the minutes. Tax season can be particularly perilous, with calls from people who falsely represent themselves as IRS agents threatening to immediately arrest recipients for fictitious tax liabilities unless they supply a credit card. Another common fraud is so-called 'free giveaways.' Hiya produces what they term a "State of the Call" to show which areas of the nation are hardest hit by fraudulent calls. "The problem is so big we see -worldwide—that 80% of incoming calls go unanswered." The dynamic methods of scammers in constantly generating vast quantities of new numbers to call from makes it impossible to simply blacklist/whitelist calls. They rely on factors like high volume and short duration from a number to determine suspect calls.

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There is high demand for both of their major services, both call protection for consumers and enterprise sources of legitimate calls wishing to differentiate themselves. “In the enterprise market, we target call center operations and customer experience leaders who look at the customer journey and want to offer a branded phone experience to help protect their multimillion-dollar brand marketing expenditures, he said. “The solution can work as well for a small nail salon as for one of the largest banks in the nation.” Among the areas of progress are appliance delivery, pharmaceutical delivery and recruiting, where companies want to make sure the best candidates respond in the midst of a hot job market.

Why do you believe Hiya is in an ‘arms race’ against robocallers and what makes you think that you have the technology to prevail?

‘It’s important to point out, not all ‘robocallers’ are bad actors. School alerts, pharmacy notifications, appointment/delivery reminders, etc., are all good legitimate calls that most people want to receive. For every wanted ‘robocall’ a person can get, there’s plenty of ones they’d like to never get. We believe we’re in an ‘arms race’ with illegal robocallers as we can see that they’re organized, and they work to circumvent our actions to stop them. Illegal robocallers are fast moving targets. If our processes and technology mix continue to be faster and more accurate than their methods, we’ll prevail.

How has Hiya been able to attract tens of millions of users in 196 countries in only three years?

Consumers have mandated more context when receiving an incoming phone call. We’ve worked hard to have the most accurate solution and we’re being rewarded with the trust of our users all around the globe.

Why is it so important for businesses to manage how their calls appear to users on mobile phones?

Most parents offer their young children this advice: ‘don’t talk to strangers.’ Is a random, unidentified phone number a stranger or someone you want to talk to? We know, 80% of the time, when you don’t know who is calling, you don’t pick up. Managing how you appear on a phone (name, logo, etc.) immediately identifies the business and brand. It’s no longer a stranger calling, it’s your health care company, your bank, your airline. Businesses invest heavily to build recognizable and respected brands. You see your favorite brands everywhere; the time has come to take that brand recognition to the phone call.

In what ways do your algorithms provide the context needed to make and receive good calls?

There’s tremendous value in having the level of scale we do. Our algorithms are constantly improving and the volume of information that we have to work with is a big reason why. Our ability to develop and identify patterns, both good and bad, is at a scale unparalleled in the marketplace. As we continue to grow as a company, so does the maturity of our algorithms and models.