

Popia to fuel better customer experiences for South Africans

 By [Sandra Galer](#)

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With the Protection of Personal Information Act (Popia) planned to commence imminently, the way direct marketing is carried out and received by South African consumers is set to shift.

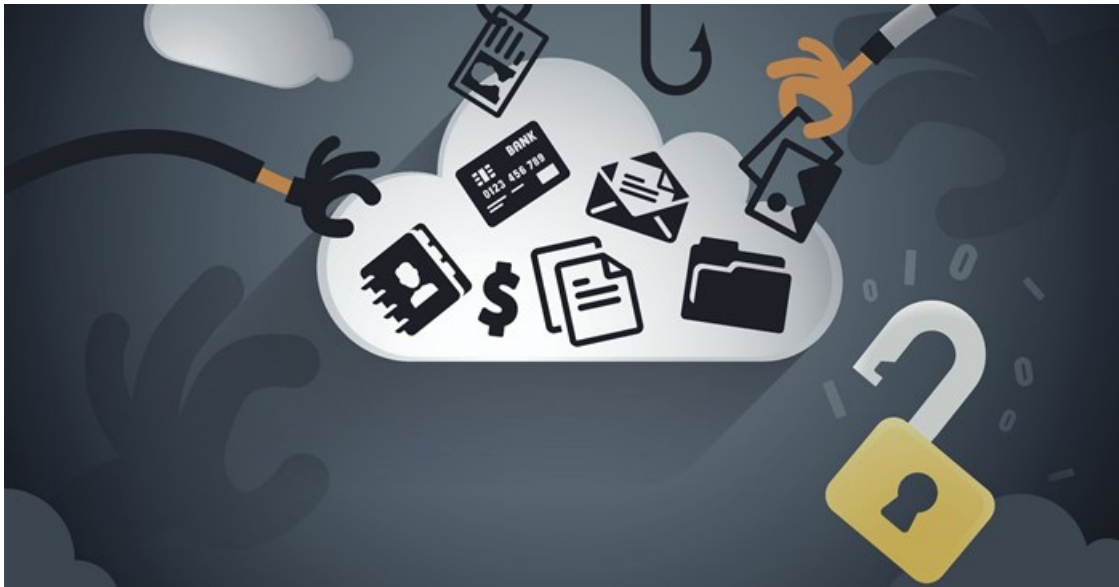


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[Research shows](#) that only 34% of South African businesses are ready to comply with the Popia and 30% only have a basic understanding of the act. Changes will be implemented in terms of the way businesses, or their customer experience partners, manage their customer databases, make use of consumer contact details, and make initial contact with potential customers. I believe these changes are positive, both for consumers and contact centres.

Win-win situation

Conducting intelligent and legal direct marketing means that contact centres are making contact with consumers who are open to the conversation and keen on discussing the products and services in question as these are relevant to them. The consequence is a positive customer experience for the consumer and a positive response rate for our clients – a win-win situation which is supported by the Popia.

As demands and interest around data privacy rises, businesses who do not make use of intelligent direct marketing strategies are not respecting the rights or wishes of consumers and are contributing to the often negative conceptions around contact centres. These businesses have often purchased a poorly sourced contact list, which they make use of in an inefficient manner, and the introduction of the Popia is aimed at putting a stop to this kind of business.

Globally, data privacy remains one of the key themes in terms of regulation, consumer demand and for marketers. In January, for example, the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) was implemented. Like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the act depicts how businesses and their customer experience partners can collect, store, make use of and share customer data, as well as gives consumers more control over their personal information.

Rights of consumers

So, what does this mean for consumers in terms of their rights?

- Consumers are obliged to ensure they protect their personal information, and only share this with businesses they trust.
- Consumers can opt-out of communication from businesses by unsubscribing from unwanted communications, such as email or SMS marketing. Consumers also have the right to ask organisations and businesses what personal information they might have on file, and ask for this to be removed or deleted.
- Consumers need to ensure they read privacy policies, to ensure they are aware of how their data is being stored, used and managed by businesses. This gives the consumer the chance to make a decision around whether or not to accept, based on what is detailed in the policy.
- Should consumers feel their privacy and personal data is not being respected, they have the right to complain to the business itself and to the Information Regulator should they feel this is necessary.

Essentially, the onus is on the consumer to protect their data and this requires a dedication to education in this regard. However, the act does offer recourse for those consumers who believe they have been unfairly targeted, or that their data has been abused.

For businesses, investment into data privacy will no longer be a choice. The Information Regulator will have the power to enforce fines of more than R10m or even pursue criminal charges for businesses who do not comply with the act. In terms of contact centres, more and more businesses are looking to partner with Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) providers in order to ensure positive customer experiences. These providers work to ensure that data is only used for the sole purpose that it was provided, and in their interactions with consumers, will ensure that consumer wishes regarding the use and storage of data are adhered to – in turn assisting businesses to remain compliant with the act.

What businesses need to consider

So, what do businesses need to consider in light of the impending passing of the act?

- The act does not just apply to customers; it also aims to safeguard employee information and data. Organisations need to ensure that employee data is up to date, secure and only used for the purpose it was provided.
- The act does not only apply to new data being collected - historical data needs to be considered too. Data that was provided a year ago will not be cleared for use at this stage. A BPO partner can assist with data cleaning exercises on behalf of businesses.
- The mere fact that a consumer is an existing customer does not mean that a business can market any product or service to them at their own discretion – businesses should be seeking advice from their legal and compliance team before launching any marketing campaigns to their customer base.
- When customers request that their data be excluded from marketing activities, the business must oblige accordingly and timeously or risk breaking the law.

Businesses should remember that the implementation of the act further highlights the fact that every interaction with a customer must be well thought out and seen as a chance to add value, and the right data will make it easier to this. Arming contact centre agents with accurate and relevant information will not only ensure that the business is abiding by the legislation, it could also increase market share.

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