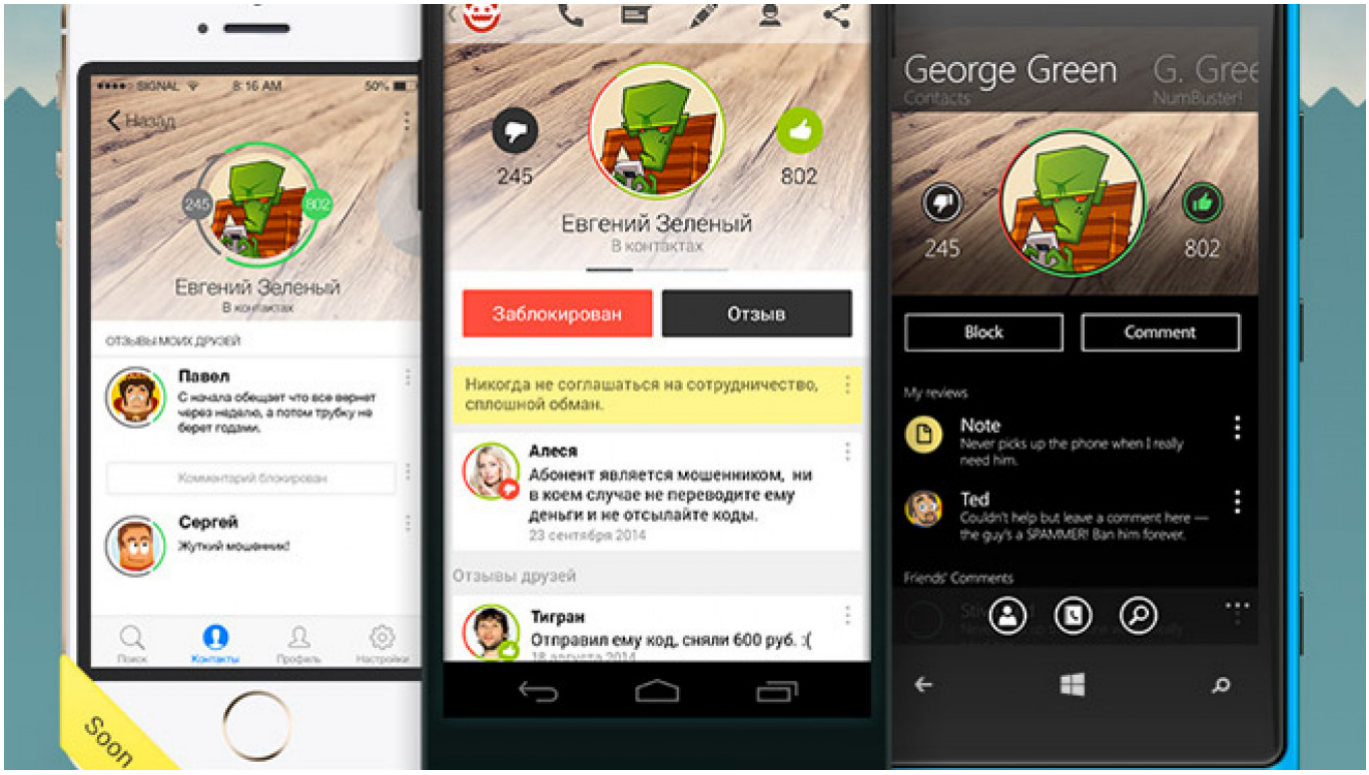
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

App Lets Russian Debtors Block Collectors Calls as Recession Begins

By The Moscow Times

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The two-month-old application, which goes under the name “AntiCollector,” also lets users identify collection agencies' phone numbers on their own.

As a falling economy and rising inflation crank up the pressure on Russia's debtors, a new mobile phone application that lets users block collection agents' calls has enjoyed a burst of popularity.

"NumBuster!," which alerts users to an unwelcome call or SMS by keeping a blacklist of collection agencies' phone numbers, has already identified over 38 million unwanted numbers — a figure equal to 26 percent of the Russian population.

The two-month-old application, which goes under the name "AntiCollector," also lets users identify collection agencies' phone numbers on their own, allowing people who have downloaded the app to expand the AntiCollector database.

According to newspaper Kommersant, Russia's National Association of Professional Collection Agencies has cried foul, approaching Google, which sells the app on its Google Play store, with a request to investigate the application's legality and possibly remove it from the store.

Collection agencies are a growing business in Russia. Banks indulged in a consumer credit boom after the 2009 financial crisis. By 2013 the Central Bank moved to curb the bubble in response to the rising share of overdue loans, many of which were granted at interest rates of 20 percent and above.

Those with loans outstanding face hard times: Cheap oil is pushing Russia toward a deep recession this year, while 11-percent inflation is eating away at the real value of incomes.

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