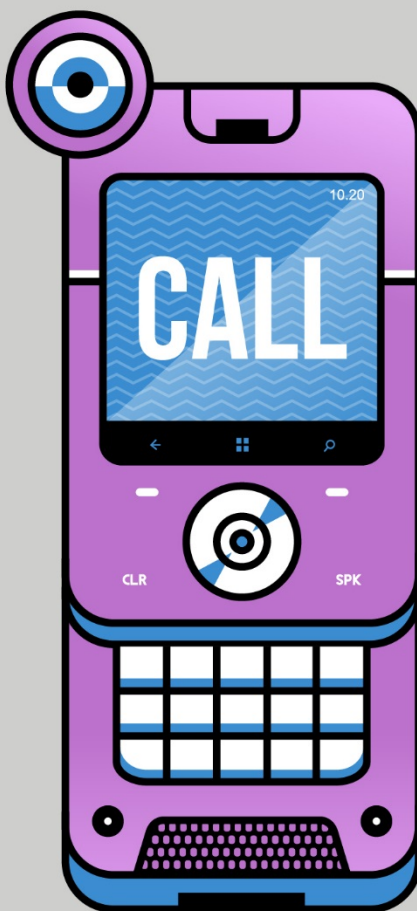
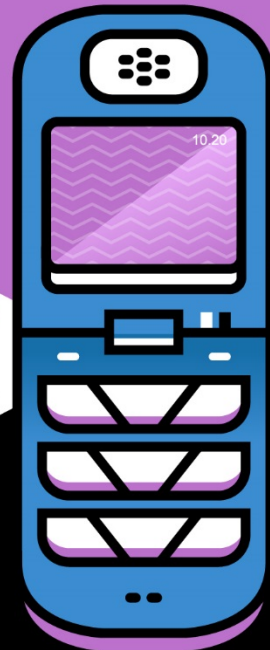


TOLL-FREE NUMBERS



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1. Abstract

Most businesses today utilize toll-free numbers to make their business accessible to everyone. This paper will convey information about what a toll-free number is, how to get one for your company, and why businesses use them. Relevant terminology will also be discussed, and a comparison of the top five providers is included.

2. About

2.1. What Are Toll-Free Numbers?

A phone number that does not cost any money for the caller is a toll-free number. Instead of charging the caller, the actual business or telephone number owner is charged. There are specific providers that sell toll-free numbers, and businesses pay for their number monthly. Every toll-free number begins with a three-digit area code. Even though toll-free numbers are commonly referred to as "800 numbers," there are actually five possible area codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, and 855. When toll-free numbers were first introduced, they all began with 800, but because of their growing popularity, more area codes had to be added.

2.2. Vanity Numbers

Vanity numbers are toll-free numbers that are typically used in advertising. They can have digits that spell out a word on an SMS keypad. For example, a bridal gown company may purchase a vanity number such as 1-800-WEDDING. Vanity numbers can also be telephone numbers that have repetitive digits, which makes it easier for customers to remember them, e.g. 800-111-2222. When choosing a vanity number, try to avoid combination numbers like (800-173-SURF). The point of these numbers is to make memorization easy; combination numbers defeat that purpose.

2.3. Why Use a Toll-Free Number

Businesses use toll-free numbers because it encourages communication with consumers. When customers can contact a business free of charge, they are more likely to call, thereby increasing call volume. Toll-free numbers add a level of professionalism to businesses. 800 numbers can be used in advertising, helping people stay connected to you and your company. Although toll-free numbers are typically used by businesses, individuals can purchase them as well. This could be beneficial for people who spend a lot of time traveling, because it will not cost their friends and family any money to contact them long distance. Toll-free numbers often come with automatic number identification, which means that the caller's number is always captured, even if the number is blocked or restricted. This way, businesses can always return missed calls.

3. How to Get a Toll-Free Number

A business or an independent person purchases the phone number through a toll-free number provider. The provider has many numbers “in stock.” The numbers are then distributed to the customer based on a first come, first served basis. Providers are required to make their entire stock of numbers available. In other words, providers are not allowed to reserve specific numbers; this is called “hoarding” and it is prohibited. The number you receive is always yours. Even if you choose to switch providers, the number comes with you. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) carries out these rules and restrictions.

3.1. Terms to Know

1. Vanity Numbers – Toll-free numbers that are easy to remember because they spell out a word, include the name of the company, or have repetitive numbers.
2. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – Control the rules and restrictions of toll-free numbers and monitor toll-free number providers.
3. Local Numbers – A virtual number that has the area code of a location other than your own. Used to give companies a local presence in an area other than where they are physically located.
4. Call Screening – Toll-free numbers utilize automatic number identification, which means that the caller’s number is always captured (even if it's blocked).
5. Voicemail-to-Email – A feature offered by most toll-free number providers, voicemail is sent to an email in the form of MP3s or text.
6. Toll-Free/800 Numbers – Phone numbers that charge the called party instead of the caller.
7. Call Blocking – Making a certain telephone number or type of telephone number unable to reach you via telephone.

3.2. Standard Features

Most providers offer:

- Vanity Numbers
- Voicemail-to-Email
- Call Screening
- Local Numbers
- Pay As You Go Plans
- Free Trial

4. How to Choose a Provider

Before choosing a toll-free number provider, ask yourself these four questions.

4.1. Do you want a vanity number?

A vanity number is great for businesses, but you may have to shop around through a few different providers to find the right one. Vanity numbers are also slightly more expensive than traditional toll-free numbers, but worth it if you plan to use the number to further your call volume and advertising efforts.

4.2. Do you want to have a local number as well as a toll-free?

Local numbers are important for certain businesses. Call centers, for example, can benefit from local numbers, because it gives the illusion that the office is located in the city for which they are answering the phones.

4.3. Do you need a free trial?

If you have had issues with providers before, or are still not sure if having a toll-free number would be beneficial for your company, then a free trial is the way to go. Some of the providers reviewed below offer a 30-day free trial. Additionally, some providers offer a money back guarantee, so trying out the service is risk free.

4.4. What is your call volume?

All of the plans offered are based on how many minutes you need. The amount of minutes corresponds to the price. If you have a low call volume, going with a plan that only charges you for the minutes you actually use is a good idea. If you have a higher call volume, going with a more expensive plan that includes a large number of minutes will save you money in the end. For example, Grasshopper offers a \$12 per month plan that costs 6 cents per minute and does not come with any included minutes, while RingCentral offers a plan that costs \$19.99 a month but includes 1,000 minutes.

5. Providers

5.1. 800.com

Pros

They offer vanity and local numbers as well as a 30-day money back guarantee.

Cons

They do not offer a free trial.

Conclusion

800.com can offer vanity numbers, local numbers, voicemail to email features, and SMS notifications for missed calls and messages. They have auto attendants and an online interface that can help customers organize their call settings. They do not offer live phone support, but do have 24/7 live chat. They can offer instant activation. They do not offer a free trial, but have a 30-day no questions asked money back guarantee. If you are not completely satisfied, they will provide a full refund of your monthly bill.

They have five different pay as you go monthly plans. All of their packages include voicemail, eFax, and an auto attendant. They have an economy package that does not come with included minutes. It is 5.9 cents per minute, which is good for low volume companies because they only have to pay for the minutes they use. They have a \$9.95 per month plan that comes with 250 minutes and costs 4.9 cents for each additional minute. Their \$19.95 plan comes with 500 minutes, with 3.9 cents per minute overage charge. There is also a 1,000-minute plan for \$29.95 per month. Minutes over 1,000 cost 2.9 cents. Their largest plan is \$49.95 per month and comes with 2,000 minutes; each additional minute is only 2.5 cents.

5.2. RingCentral

Pros

They have a 30-day free trial and 24/7 live support.

Cons

Vanity numbers cost an extra \$30 and they have hidden add-on fees.

Conclusion

RingCentral can offer local numbers, call forwarding, dial by name, auto receptionist, voicemail to email features, a software demo and instant activation. They offer live telephone customer support and a support page on their site. They have a demo of the service, a 30-day free trial, and a 30-day money back guarantee. Unfortunately, their vanity numbers require a one-time \$30 set-up fee and their extensions cost \$2.99 extra per month. RingCentral gives you the option to tack on additional numbers, but they cost an extra \$4.99 per month.

Their most inexpensive plan is \$9.99 per month and includes 300 local or long distance minutes, eFax, two extensions, and costs 4.9 cents for each additional minute. Their mid-grade plan costs \$19.99 a month with 1,000 minutes. Each minute over 1,000 costs 4.4 cents and this plan comes with five extensions. They have a professional plan that costs \$24.99 per month and includes 2,000 local or long distance minutes in addition to 1,000 toll-free minutes. This plan also comes with 10 extensions and eFax. Their pro plan does not come with a free trial. International rates are available on their site.

5.3. iTeleCenter

Pros

They offer local numbers, vanity numbers, and call blocking.

Cons

Their free trial is only 14 days.

Conclusion

iTeleCenter has been in business since 1992. They are located in New Jersey and deal with small and large clients. They do not require customers to sign contracts; instead, they bill on a month-to-month basis. They can offer local and vanity numbers. They have a free trial, but it is only 14 days. Most providers offer a 30-day trial. They do not offer any sort of money back guarantee. They have easy set-up and immediate activation. They can offer call blocking, and all plans come with a minimum of 10 extensions.

Their basic plan is \$19.95 per month and comes with 500 minutes and 10 extensions. Each additional minute is 5.9 cents and there is a one-time \$15 activation fee. Their professional plan costs \$39.95 per month and comes with 1,500 minutes and 15 extensions. Additional minutes cost 4.9 cents each; this plan also requires a \$15 activation fee. Their largest premier plan costs \$99.95 per month and comes with 5,000 minutes, 3.9 cents for additional minutes. The activation fee is waived for this plan.

5.4. Freedom Voice

Pros

They have a 30-day free trial, call screening, and instant activation.

Cons

Voicemail-to-email costs an additional \$10 per month.

Conclusion

Freedom Voice offers vanity numbers, local numbers, call forwarding with hold music, call blocking and

virtual receptionist. With their voicemail transcription feature, they can send voicemail to your email in the form of MP3s for an additional \$10 per month. They also have an internet control panel for call settings. They do have a 30-day free trial but do not offer any sort of money back guarantee.

They have three monthly pay as you go plans ranging from basic to advanced. Their cheapest plan is \$9.95 per month and includes 10 voicemail boxes, 300 minutes, and a 4.9 cent charge for each additional minute. They have a \$24.95 per month plan with 25 voicemail boxes, 1,000 minutes and 3.9 cents for every minute over. Their larger plan costs \$59.95 per month and comes with 100 voicemail boxes and 2,500 minutes. Each minute over 2,500 costs 3.9 cents.

5.5. Grasshopper

Pros

They offer free activation for all plans, 24/7 customer support, and a 30-day money back guarantee.

Cons

Requires a 30-day termination notice.

Conclusion

Grasshopper was started in 2003 by two entrepreneurs, and it has grown every year since. The service now has 100,000 customers. Their purpose is "to empower entrepreneurs to succeed." They offer local numbers, voicemail to email, extensive customer support (live phone support, live chat, and a support center on their site), pay as you go contracts with the option to upgrade at any time, vanity numbers, call screening, and a 30-day money back guarantee. Their guarantee is no questions asked and on the site, they say, "If you're not 100% satisfied within 30 days we'll give you a full refund."

They have plans for both small and large budgets. Their largest plan costs \$199 per month and comes with 10,000 minutes. This comes with three toll-free or local numbers, unlimited extensions, and free installation. Their cheapest plan is \$12 per month and costs 6 cents per minute for one toll-free or local number. All of their plans come with an unlimited number of extensions.

6. Toll-Free Numbers Matrix

	800.com	iTeleCenter	Freedom Voice	Ring Central	Grasshopper
Vanity Numbers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, \$30 one-time fee	Yes
Voicemail-to-Email	Yes	Yes	Yes, extra \$10/month	Yes	Yes
Call Screening	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Option for Local Number	Yes	Local city Numbers only	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free Trial	No, but 30-day money back guarantee	14 days	30 days	Yes, 30 days	30-day money back guarantee
Pay As You Go Plans	Yes	Month-to-month	Month-to-month	Month-to-month	Month-to-month
Customer Support	During business hours 24/7 live chat	During business hours 24/7 live chat	During business hours	24/7	24/7
Pricing	\$9.94-\$49.95	\$19.95-\$99.95	\$9.95-\$59.95	\$19.99-\$24.99	\$12-\$199