



## What is a Toll-Free Number and How Does it Work?

*Toll-free numbers* are telephone numbers with distinct three-digit codes that can be dialed from landlines with no charge to the person placing the call. Such numbers allow callers to reach businesses and/or individuals out of the area without being charged a long-distance fee for the call.

Toll-free numbers are particularly common for customer-service calling. Toll-free service has traditionally provided potential customers and others with a free and convenient way to contact businesses. Wireless callers, however, will be charged for the airtime minutes used during a toll-free call unless they have an “unlimited calling” plan.

Customers can also send text messages to toll-free numbers, so long as those numbers are “text enabled,” and businesses can send texts in response.

### **Toll-free codes – 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844 and 833.**

Toll-free numbers are numbers that begin with one of the following three-digit codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844 or 833. Although 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844 and 833 are all toll-free codes, they are not interchangeable. Dialing a number using a 1-800 prefix would reach a different recipient than dialing that number using a 1-888 prefix. Calls to each toll-free number are routed to a particular local telephone number.

### **How are toll-free numbers assigned?**

Toll-free numbers are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis by entities called “Responsible Organizations” or “RespOrgs.” Many of these entities also provide toll-free service. RespOrgs have access to a toll-free database that contains information regarding the status of all toll-free numbers. RespOrgs are certified by Somos, Inc., administrator of the toll-free number database.

You can contact a RespOrg if you want to obtain a toll-free number. If you need help locating a RespOrg, call or text the Somos Help Desk at 1-844-HEY SOMOS (1-844-439-7666), or visit [www.somos.com/find-a-toll-free-number](http://www.somos.com/find-a-toll-free-number) for assistance.

### **The FCC’s role**

The FCC sets the rules for getting and using toll-free numbers. The FCC requires that toll-free numbers be portable, meaning that a subscriber can “port,” or move, their number to a new RespOrg when changing service providers.

However, the FCC is not involved in the actual assignment of toll-free numbers and cannot access the number database. Nor can the FCC provide any information about the status of a number.

## What is a vanity number?

A "vanity" number is a toll-free telephone number that spells a name, word or acronym chosen by the subscriber, such as 1-800-FLOWERS or 1-888-NEW-CARS.

## 'Warehousing,' 'hoarding' and 'brokering' toll-free numbers

FCC rules prohibit RespOrgs from "warehousing" toll-free numbers. A RespOrg may not legally reserve a toll-free number without having an actual toll-free subscriber for whom the number is being reserved. RespOrgs who warehouse numbers are subject to penalties.

"Hoarding" by subscribers is similarly prohibited by FCC rules. A subscriber may not acquire more toll-free numbers than the subscriber intends to use. Hoarding also includes the illegal practice of "number brokering" – the selling or offering to sell a toll-free number.

## Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at [consumercomplaints.fcc.gov](https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov)
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
45 L Street NE  
Washington, DC 20554

## Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at [www.fcc.gov/consumers](https://www.fcc.gov/consumers).

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Last Reviewed 12/31/19

