

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

Toll free numbers are numbers that begin with one of the following three-digit codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, or 844. Toll free numbers allow callers to reach businesses and/or individuals without being charged for the call. The charge for using a toll free number is paid by the called party (the toll free subscriber) instead of the calling party. Toll free numbers can be dialed directly to your business or personal telephone line.

Toll free numbers are very common and have proven successful for businesses, particularly in the areas of customer service and telemarketing. Toll free service has traditionally provided potential customers and others with a "free" and convenient way to contact businesses. In addition, customers may now 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, and 844.**

Today, there are six toll free codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, and 844. Although 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, and 844 are all toll free codes, they are not interchangeable. For example, 1-800-234-5678 is not the same number as 1-888-234-5678. 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 the toll free database, which contains information regarding the status of all toll free numbers. RespOrgs are certified by Somos, Inc., the toll free database administrator.

There are several hundred RespOrgs in the United States. Contact one of them 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 <https://www.somos.com/find-a-toll-free-number> for assistance.

### **What is the FCC's role?**

The FCC regulates or sets the rules for getting and using toll free numbers. The FCC requires that toll free numbers be portable, meaning that a toll free subscriber can "port," or move, his or her number to a new RespOrg when changing toll free service providers. The FCC's rules also prohibit "warehousing," "hoarding," and "brokering" of toll free numbers, as described below.

The FCC, however, is not involved in the day-to-day assignment of toll free numbers and cannot access the toll free number database. Nor can the FCC provide any information about the status of a toll free number, such as the RespOrg or subscriber for the number, or a request for a toll free number.

## What is a “vanity” number?

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

## “Warehousing/hoarding/brokering” toll free numbers

"Warehousing" of toll free numbers by RespOrgs is prohibited by the FCC's rules. 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 "number brokering" – selling or offering to sell a toll free number. Thus, it is illegal for a subscriber to sell or offer 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 <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  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

## Consumer Help Center

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

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