

Why You Should Get a Toll Free Number for Your Business

In today's world of cell phones and digital media, many business owners – particularly small business owners – no longer consider an 800 number a necessity to running a successful business. After all, many cell phone plans offer free long distance; and in any case, many customers choose to get in touch for free via email.

Having an [800 number](#) can still benefit a business immensely, however. Although a toll-free number is no longer a necessity for allowing customers to get in touch with you, it definitely makes your business appear more credible. A small business without a toll-free number gives an impression of being run out of someone's garage – whereas when customers see an 800 number, they imagine a brick-and-mortar business with a storefront, dedicated phone lines, and phone book ads.

Whether or not your business fits the latter example, it is obviously in your best interests to give your customers the impression that it does. Getting an 800 number can be a little intimidating, but it isn't as difficult as you might think. Here is what you need to know in order to get a toll-free number for your business.

How Does an 800 Number Work?

Years ago, the expense of setting up a [toll-free number](#) prevented many small and mid-size businesses from getting their own 800 numbers. Even today, most people think of a toll-free number as unattainable for most small businesses – which is probably why it impresses customers so much. On the contrary, though, an 800 number is relatively easy to acquire – in most cases, all you need is an existing phone, even a cell phone.

Toll-Free Forwarding Versus a Dedicated Line

For the typical small or mid-sized business, the toll-free service provider simply forwards calls to the designated number. Depending on your business setup, that could be your office phone, your home line, or even a cell phone. Some providers will even forward the call to multiple lines at once, allowing you to answer the call wherever you are at the time.

Businesses with higher volumes of incoming calls might want to consider a designated line instead. Basically, you will need to have a new phone line installed, which will be used solely for incoming toll-free calls. Although you will need to pay for the installation and setup, you will get a better per-minute rate on incoming calls, which will more than make up for the initial expense.

The Toll-Free Prefix

It used to be that an 800 number was the only kind of toll-free number. However, as these numbers became more popular for businesses, other prefixes were added in order to increase availability. The benefit is that if an 800 number you want – such as one that is similar to your local number, or one that spells something out – is already taken, you can get it using another toll-free prefix.

The prefixes for toll-free numbers are:

- 800
- 888
- 877
- 866

Finding a Toll-Free Service Provider

There are many toll-free service providers to choose from: the big, well-known providers such as AT&T and MCI, as well as many smaller providers. Contrary to common belief, large providers cannot offer you a greater choice of numbers. Although each provider typically has a pool of available numbers under their name, you can choose any toll-free number that is not already in use. Since the availability of numbers is the same for every provider, you are free to choose your provider according to the rates and features they can offer.

Finding the Best Rates

Rates can vary widely between toll-free service providers. Although many people believe that large service providers will be able to offer the best

rates, in fact the opposite is often true. Your best bet is to shop around, comparing the rates and features offered by different providers.

There are two basic types of rates you will need to compare:

- Monthly rates – Most toll-free service providers will charge you a base fee every month, regardless of whether you receive any incoming calls. Monthly fees may be as much as \$20, or you may not need to pay any at all.
- Per-minute rates – On top of the monthly fees, you will need to consider how much you are charged per minute for incoming calls. In general, these rates range from 7 cents to 30 cents per minute, although smaller businesses will pay more per minute than those that receive a higher volume of calls. You should also compare billing increments between plans – the smaller the increment, the better – and avoid plans that require you to meet a minimum number of minutes every month.

Deciding What Features You Want

There are a number of features available for toll-free numbers. You will need to decide which features you would like to have, and then compare the availability and price of these features between different providers.

Some of the features offered on 800 numbers include:

- Call blocking – Block callers who fall outside your coverage (and would therefore cost you more than other callers), such as calls originating from pay phones.
- Account codes – By requiring employees and/or customers to enter an access code, you can ensure that only authorized callers get through.
- ANI – Just like caller ID on your home line, ANI tells you who is calling. This feature can also be set up to display the caller's information on a computer.
- Dialed Number Identification Service (DNIS) – If you have more than one 800 number, DNIS lets you know which number was called. This is particularly useful if you are running multiple marketing campaigns, and would like to know which is the most successful.

Choosing a Toll-Free Number

As already noted, your choice of a toll-free service provider will not limit the variety of 800 numbers available to you. You can either choose a number from the provider's pool, or a "vanity number."

Choosing from the Provider's Pool

Service providers generally have a pool of toll-free numbers that have been set aside for them. Because these numbers are already in the provider's system, your 800 number can be set up much more quickly than if you choose a number from outside the provider's pool.

Selecting a Vanity Number

A toll-free number that you choose yourself, either because it is similar to your office number or because the corresponding letters spell out something memorable, is known as a vanity number. As long as the number is not being used by another business, you will be able to claim it. However, if it is not already in your provider's pool of numbers, you will need to wait about a week for the number to be transferred and your account to be activated. The good news is that once you have claimed an 800 number, it is yours: Even if you decide to change providers, you can take your number with you.

Using Your Toll-Free Number

Once you have selected an 800 number and a provider, you need only to wait for your account to be set up. Before you start giving your toll-free number out to customers, you should test it with the help of family and friends in various locations. After you have ensured that the number works and the sound quality is acceptable, you are ready to benefit from the added credibility an 800 number gives to your business!

About the Author

Jason Kay is a regular contributor to business related websites such as [Best Toll Free 800 Numbers](#), which provides customer reviews and ratings of [toll-free number](#) services.

Source: <http://www.articlefacility.com>