

The Process of Getting Great Numbers

Small to medium businesses generally use toll free numbers in advertising so it's important to get a good number but they don't want to pay an arm and a leg to get a good 800 number.

This section is called "The Process" because it's basically the process to pursue a good vanity number yourself even when the standard phone company searches show it's taken. This guide basically explains the steps and advice I usually give small to medium sized businesses, and what I've gotten paid tens of thousands of dollars for doing for larger clients. It may seem silly to some, to tell people how to do what I get paid to do for other companies, but I don't want to charge companies thousands of dollars to do something they could do themselves with the right information and tools. I'd rather provide the information and tools necessary for those smaller clients and be a backup if they need help as well as a real consultant to the larger advertiser. It's a fun niche and I hope this is helpful for you and you can get a really good number for your business. Getting a good number isn't easy and takes some work, but it's more important than most people realize because it can make a significant difference in the response rate for all your advertising, for the life of your business.

This section will focus on outlining the process and options to obtain a memorable vanity number rather than on the toll free service selection as the SOHO Toll Free Guide does. Just as with domain names, the acquisition of a good name or number is the hard part. The hosting and registrar services are still important in the long run, but the acquisition of a good number/name is really the key, and unfortunately most toll free providers don't understand or help much with that. Large phone companies have to have hundreds of representatives and they just don't understand marketing. They are taught how to transfer or activate a toll free number but they aren't taught the marketing side and they're employees so they don't earn their money based on the advertising response rate the way the business owner does. Their goal is usually just to come up with the simplest and quickest solution. My goal, like yours, is to help you find the best possible number, because I only make money if I can get you something really good.

There are a lot of options and ways to pursue this, but I've tried to simplify things down to a couple basic steps for you. You may not need to do all of them if you find something good along the way, but this is the process. Generic terms and phrases are extremely difficult as are true "800" numbers, but if you follow these basic steps carefully, you'll wind up with the best numbers possible for your business and hopefully at least find something good that works and doesn't cost too much.

Ī Take your best shot!

When they think about it for a minute, most people have an idea of what their ideal number might be. So go ahead and just start by plugging a few things into the Vanity Number Lookup tool on the top right part of the page. Try the first dozen or so things you think of. Most people realize they might not be able to get their first choice and can come up with at least a dozen or possibilities off the top of their head. Go ahead and brainstorm for a few minutes. You can enter letters or numbers, can even use * as a wild card to increase your possibilities, and shouldn't limit yourself to 7 digits.

If you find something available you can get it through AT&T or we can also place a Universal Reservation on it, activate it immediately and allow you to transfer it to any toll free provider you want. (See UniversalReservations.com for more information on the reservation process) Either way if you find something good you probably don't need to go any further. Also if you find something you like and want us to put it on hold while you continue searching let us know, we will reserve it for you at no cost at all.

After you've tried all of the things that you can think of off the top of your head, it's time to get serious about the most important and often skipped over step, the Brainstorming portion. You can start your list from scratch or when you leave, if you've done any searches, a popup box will come up that you can enter your email address in. It will send you a list of all of the searches you did and the numbers that were available by email.

Ī Be More Creative

This is one of the most skipped over step, because people often think the first couple generic names they think of are the only good names. This often leads to phone calls from people complaining that everything they enter is taken. However, when we talk about it they usually admit that they were only doing what they assumed would be the most valuable ones, which are always taken because they're the first ones everyone else in their industry thinks of too.

Why?

There are two ways to approach the creativity process. Many people often think they know what the best possible name or names are so they don't need to be really creative or thorough. They just know the best option is so why go through all the work to get more. It's true they may know what the first choice is, but when that's not available they have to start over on the second and so on. They wind up repeating the whole process over and over one at a time. Even if they keep going

and don't get discouraged in the end, they will have done twice as much work and not gotten results as good as they would have if they had really taken the time to be thorough.

People call for help for a variety of reasons. But when it comes down to it, this is the one area that most of the people I talk to need to focus more on. They often wind up beating their head against the wall, focused on one particular number without considering any other options. I always explain that there are 50 to 100 or more possible good names/numbers for ANY project.

You'll also find the more creative you are the more likely the number may be available. You might be surprised that the 83rd name you think of often turns out to be the best and you never would have gotten that far if you tried doing them one at a time. That's why I always say this is the most important part of the process and you really need an extremely thorough list of ALL the possible names. The one exception could be for a 4 or 5 digit word if you use my Core Word System, explained in the next section.

Many people also focus on generic names. They don't realize that, not only are generic words and phrases not the only good names, they're often not even the best names, not to mention the fact that they are the first thing thousands of other people have thought of before so they're less likely to be available too. Generic phrases like 1-800 CALL NOW might seem great, but they don't have much connection with your business. Even an industry term, which is generally better than a pure generic phrase often isn't as good as a more creative and clever word or phrase that focuses on your strongest selling point. In the mortgage business for instance, (the hottest category for vanity numbers for the past several years) you might think that 1-800 MORTGAGE is the best possible number. But it's not. 1-800 FAST CLOSER, 1-800 GREAT RATE and 1-800 QUICK LOAN for example (all numbers that I've gotten for clients) tell your industry just the same as 1-800 MORTGAGE does, but they actually tell something even more important, your strongest selling point.

How?

I have a more thorough description of the links and process in my ebook, but that's 8 pages so I'm not going to repeat that whole thing here. But I will give you enough to get the idea and some of my favorite creativity links that will help you.

Start with some core words and use those to start a list, not of phone number possibilities but of words related to your concept. Your first goal is to create a list of ALL words at all related to your concept. You can probably think of a few of the first "core" words off the top of your head. But do NOT try to do this in your head. Open a document and start a list. Then start visiting the links below and

enter several of your core words. Most will return a list of terms, domains, keywords or whatever but just copy that list and paste it into your list. Do this with all of your terms copying and pasting the results each time into your list.

If you do this properly, you'll have a dozen pages before you know it. Some words aren't going to relate much, but after a few minutes you'll have the whole universe of words related to your concept. Next print the list out and make a couple extra copies while you're at it. There's something about holding a pen and paper in your hand that makes us more creative than the keyboard. Now, give a copy to someone else involved in the project, someone that you trust and understands some of your concept. Ask them to go over the list and think about names, phrases and anything related to your business and to make as many notes as possible on the paper.

The goal is literally to put as much ink on the paper as possible. Then get back together with them afterwards and talk about your concepts together. It's important to do this with another person if possible because you will each have different ideas and those will spark new ideas in each other. Don't prejudge or try to decide which ones are the best yet. Just put everything you can think of down. Sometimes something you don't really like can spark something else better. You'll be surprised how easy it is to come up with 100-200 possible names when you do this right. You'll also want to keep this list in a safe place because you may need it again for keywords, product names or a dozen other things you don't even realize right now.

Add small words in front of your core words. KITCHEN becomes MY KITCHEN, THE KITCHEN, OUR KITCHEN, 4 A KITCHEN, ANY KITCHEN, FOR KITCHENS, GET KITCHENS, PRO KITCHEN, etc. This will allow you to turn a single word into several dozen possibilities. Use my Prefix word list of 2 and 3 digit words in my ebook if you need more.

Brainstorming Links:

<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/online/index.html>

<http://www.kwmap.net>

<http://www.wordsmyth.net>

<http://www.keywordcount.com>

<https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox>

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion>

http://www.sli-systems.com/search_suggestions.php

Some additional domain name links:

<http://www.whois.net>

<http://www.deleteddomains.com>

<http://www.domainsurfer.com>

<http://www.namewinner.com>

<http://www.tollfreenumbers.com/domainnametools.htm>

In the end you should have at least 50 but more like 100 to 200 possible names. This way your spouse or someone higher up won't think of one you haven't tried at the last minute and make you start over again and again. It's much easier to be methodical and do it right, than to try and short cut this process. It also makes it easier to make a final decision too. Now you're ready to go back to the lookup tool prepared with a thorough list of all at possibilities.

Ⓓ Try the Vanity Number Lookup again

You'll want to restart your search at the Vanity Number Lookup tool but this time you should be armed with a killer list of ALL the possibilities. Some aren't going to be as good but don't worry about that. Enter them all in and either copy and paste the results each time into a document or just enter your email address when you leave to get a copy of all of the searches you just did and the results. Check them all, even if you find something good available because you don't just want to find just one option, you want to find ALL the options and then pick the best one. You might even like to get more than one but this way you'll know that you have all the possible options available.

Before you do too many searches, enter ***-**** to make sure the lookup tool is working. It should return 10 numbers (usually 866 #s) so you know the connection is working. If it doesn't find anything at all, the connection is down temporarily. That happens once in a while, but doesn't usually last that long.

Remember you can enter letters or numbers. You don't need to translate the words to digits. You can use * as a wild card in front of or behind your core word to increase your possibilities. You also shouldn't limit yourself to 7 digits. Most of the words or phrases on your list don't have exactly 7 digits and it doesn't matter. Just enter the first 7 digits in the lookup. To check 800 MARKETER, for example, you could enter 627-5383 or MAR-KETE in the lookup tool. The last R is only added in my advertising and use to make it more memorable.

My Core Word System

If you have a 4 or 5 digit word try my core word system, this is basically a way to find everything possible around your one core word. You don't have to be as creative for this as it's much ore methodical. It can also make you look extremely thorough to your boss, but it only works on 4 or 5 digit words. There are two basic steps. The first is to find all of the numbers that are available which start with your

core word and end with ?? or ????. Then you just make a list of all the words that could be started with those 2 or 3 digits. Most of the words won't be that helpful, but there are usually hundreds of possible words and something usually stands out.

The lookup tool allows you to use wildcards, but if you use two or three wildcards you usually run into the limit of 10 matching numbers, except for extremely popular core words. So instead of two *s you'll have to do multiple searches using a * and a digit which you rotate. So you run separate searches for WORDS2*, WORDS3*, WORDS4*, WORDS5*... up to WORDS9*. I started at 2 because you don't need to worry about 1s or 0s because there are no letters on those keys. You can either copy the results and paste them into a document each time and then clean it up a little to get the results or you can leave the site and have it email you the results of all the searches when you leave. If you have a 4 digit word, you'll have to use two digits instead of one, for example WORD22*, WORD 23*, WORD 24*, WORD 25* up to 29, then 32 to 39 etc up to 99. You'll have to do 8 searches for a 5 digit word and 64 searches for a 4 digit word but either way, you wind up with a list of all the numbers that are possible in any toll free number after WORD?? or WORDS???. Now all you need to do is make a list of all the words that can be started with those two or three digits. You'll need to go to my Digital Dictionary for that. At the bottom of the Lookup button in the keypad is a table of numbers. Click on the digits you found available and it'll give you a list of all the words that could be spelled on the phone starting with those two or three digits. Just copy the list for each combination you found and paste it into your document and you'll have probably have hundreds or maybe even thousands of possible words which could be created with the digits available after your core word. This takes a little time but winds up being extremely thorough and it'll give you more options than you could think up individually. Just pick the best word or words and contact us to reserve those numbers for you.

My Core Word System looks for words after your word for two reasons. Most people with a 4 digit word tend to put it at the end, after the dash. So there are usually more combinations left available with your core word at the beginning. People tend to put the words at the end with digits in front for a couple reasons: because it looks more like a phone number; because when numbers are given out by prefix as they are for local numbers it's much easier to get your 4 digit word at the end of the number than to get the right prefix available in your area; and because if you have a longer word you have more options available with digits in front and can run the word off the back if necessary.

It's also better to put the digits at the back rather than the front because you're much more likely to be able to make those digits into another word which is more memorable than digits. Most two or three digit combinations can start a lot of words but there are very few two or three digit combinations that are helpful in front of a word. 435-LIMO won't spell anything, but LIMO-435 starts at least a

dozen words including HELP. And 8** LIMO-HELP is much more memorable than 8** LIMO 435 or 8** 435 LIMO.

If you find a number you like, email or call us right away and we can reserve it for you. Email me directly at billquimby@billquimby.net and put "800RESERVATION" in the subject line for priority handling or call me at
1-800 MARKETER.

Even if you want to keep looking and just want us hold the number for you we can do that for at least a month so you have a back up number. Numbers come and go constantly so if you find something you really like it's a good idea to lock it in to insure that it's available if you decide to take it. "800" numbers are especially scarce and good "800" numbers often only stay in the pool for a matter of minutes. We don't charge anything for reserving a number and will hold it for you.

TIP: Most of the time, numbers that are being returned to the spare pool go in at 11:30pm CST. I usually look starting 15 minutes before that and a half hour afterwards to get the best numbers. But if you can't put a reservation in, in real time, it may be better to search during the morning when you can reserve a number more quickly.

The lookup tool searches right into the national SMS/800 database that all of the phone companies ultimately have access to, (although most of the smaller companies don't have direct access but go through another company.) If the Vanity Number Lookup tool says something is not available all of the phone companies will tell you the same thing. The difference is that they want you to think that's the ultimate answer. Most people stop there but in reality it's not quite so black and white. There are numbers that show active in the national database but which don't really have any active customer any more. It takes more work to track these down but going that extra mile can help you get a really great number that can be extremely valuable for your organization.

There are a couple places you should check online, although they only have a small percentage of all toll free numbers listed. Try Google.com, GoTollFree.com, and AnyWho.com (the AT&T directory which also powers 800-555-1212). There is no central database but these are probably at least worth a try.

Now you're ready to go the extra mile. I'm going to show you the simple secrets about how I've gotten extremely valuable numbers for my clients by digging deeper to track down hidden numbers in the gray area.

Ñ Digging a little deeper

“Going the extra mile is especially helpful when everyone else says that’s as far as you can go.”

The first thing to do if you’re going to dig deeper is to get a back up number because you have deadlines and this is unpredictable. So you don’t want to get most of the way through and have things hit a snag without having a backup number on reserve that we can activate for you at the last minute.

The next thing to do is so simple people sometimes overlook it. Just pick up the phone and dial the number. If the phone number doesn’t go through that does NOT mean it’s available, any more than if you put a domain name into your browser and it doesn’t pull up a web page that, that means the domain name is available to be registered. The only thing you can really know for sure by dialing a number/entering a domain name is that if it does go through to someone or to a website, that it’s definitely not available except through that end user. The biggest difference between domain names and toll free numbers is that there’s no “whois” type of central or open database with the owners information. The owners information is kept by each phone company and is not public or given out very readily.

What to look for when dialing the number

The best numbers to research and dig deeper into are usually the numbers that don’t go through to any active customer because it’s just easier to get someone to give up a number that’s not in use than to get them to give up a number they’re actively using (or advertising). Ironically the ones that are easy to get through on are the harder ones to get and the ones that are harder to get through to the end user are really the best ones to pursue.

You should basically look for any numbers that don’t have any detectable end user, especially phone company intercept messages, including recordings that say a number is disconnected, not in service, invalid or unable to be completed as dialed. Also add to this group numbers that go to fast busy signals (as opposed to regular busy signals which mean the ring to number is in use or busied out). You should also avoid numbers that say they’re blocked or not available from your calling area, as those are usually in use in another part of the country or Canada. You should call at least the 800 version of all the numbers on your list and the 888 versions if you have time. I generally don’t dial all the 866 or 877 numbers unless it’s your first choice in names. Put all of the numbers on your master list that don’t go through into another list we’ll call your Possibilities List.

Your Possibilities List

The first thing to do with this possibilities list is to locate the phone company responsible for each number. If you email me the list, I'll lookup and tell you the phone company and their phone number for each toll free number. You'll want to call the phone company to do some reconnaissance on the number. You should always take really good notes on every call. You should keep track of at least the first name, the city and if possible the department of every person you talk to as well as the time and date of every call. You can never take a phone company representative's answers at face value and will have to call multiple times to either verify information or get a little more each time, and you probably don't want to talk to the same person twice.

You can try calling as the owner and just ask why it's not working or say you printed this number on some advertising by mistake. You may also get better information at some companies from people in billing, since they are anxious to get you to send in money to them. You can just ask if you really have to have the account number on the check because you don't have that handy, and 4 times out of 5, they'll give it to you. Or you can ask whether they're sending the bill to the home or office address (if it's a small account) and they often tell you the address or at least the city. If you don't get anywhere on the first call, just try again. There are good and bad representatives in every company so don't get hung up on anyone that says it's not possible. People always say that when they don't know how to do something.

Your goal is basically to find out two things. You want to know why it's not working first. That may put an end to it right there if it's actually working but only accessible from Canada for example. The next thing to try to get is the end user information. Get whatever information you can on the end user and augment that with searching on the Internet. After you get a little information try to get the number reactivated again or contact the end user.

How do numbers get stuck in limbo?

Most phone company representatives don't understand limbo or realize that it exists. They are only trained on how the system is supposed to work and they only see numbers being used in the system. But since phone numbers don't have any physical presence and can't be seen if they're not working or where they're supposed to be, a lot of numbers linger out there non-working, on old or non-existing accounts and still showing active in the SMS800 but just lost in the cracks. Nobody teaches about or is trained on these because they aren't there on purpose and are hard to define. Most phone company representatives also don't know how to do anything this, because they don't see it.

Examples of this are numbers that are held by one carrier but that carrier believes they are with a reseller. The reseller doesn't have any records on it and doesn't believe it's their number. Many long distance companies have been merged and there are often a lot of numbers 'lost' with the company that was merged. When a company goes out of business and the account goes into collection, a number is often suspended and held rather than being thrown back. But even after the account is written off the number is often held there. These things also happen at the customer level. When someone gets a couple numbers for projects that don't end up materializing the numbers remain. When a company is merged and people are let go, the numbers they had are often ignored if they're not being used much. People coming and going, companies merging and moving and plans just changing all cause numbers to be ignored or even lost. And if a number isn't going through to an end user anywhere, then it won't generate any expense to show anything on a phone bill.

Do you understand or even look at everything on your personal phone bill? Well imagine if you had hundreds or even thousands of times as many phone lines on a business account. It's easy to understand why numbers get lost or misplaced, either at the customer level or at the phone company level. Life is just very chaotic and there's not much cleansing or maintenance process for the 800 system.

If you can't get the information directly from the phone company, I'll let you use one of my best secret weapons for hard to get numbers. I have one of the best Private Investigators in the country on retainer for tracking down the customer name and address if you can't get it from the phone company. It costs a couple bucks and takes a couple days but it guarantees to get you the end user information. That doesn't guarantee you'll be able to get the number, but it can be invaluable in tracking down a really hard to locate number. There are two ways to use this information. You should start by looking for and contacting the end user. You can also use that information back at the phone company too though.

Contacting the end user.

Getting the name and address from the phone company information, doesn't mean you'll be able to find or reach anyone. Many times when someone cancels a number, or gets a number canceled they aren't still around or don't exist any more. It may take some detective work to locate anyone even with the name and address. Try searching for other neighboring addresses or relatives in the area. Check with the secretary of state if it's incorporated, or get some more professional help in researching it if necessary.

If the business or person is really gone sometimes you can use that information at the phone company too, to get the number released or even reactivated. This is also how you can verify the information too. But keep in mind that sometimes there

really is no information left on the customer or there isn't very much information left.

Sometimes a transfer request with the right name and address is enough to get a number switched over to a new company where it can be set up properly. There's more in my 2nd Ebook, "Getting Great Numbers" about a few alternative ways to get a number working again. There is also more in that about the approaches to use when contacting the end user, but the simplest way to summarize the way to approach the end user is to make a friend and make it no big deal.

The first thing I told you in the digging deeper section was that you need to have a back up because it's a very difficult thing and sometimes can't be done. But I also specialize in doing the impossible and am often able to get numbers working again for clients. I do this as a consultant and it costs quite a bit more than just getting a number out of the spare pool. But at least it's an option for important projects. There's more about this in the Other Options section.

○ Other options to consider

If you can't find a good vanity number you like or even if you just need another number for a fax number or for tracking purposes, another option you may want to consider are numeric numbers. Numeric numbers don't have the same memorability as vanity numbers although some people like them as consumers because they are easy to dial. We have a list of numeric numbers available at little or even no extra fee at UniversalReservations.com. They can also be activated immediately and transferred over to the carrier of your choice.

Numeric numbers are especially good in certain circumstance including

1. Foreign language audiences
2. Elderly audiences
3. Call centers that change clients repeatedly
4. Repeat dialing situations
5. Fax numbers

Getting some additional Consulting Help

There are hundreds of good numeric numbers available at UniversalReservations.com at no extra cost as well as a few that cost a little more too. Either we are trying to give you the best possible 800 number options available for any situation.

This guide comes not only has a lot of information you won't find anywhere else (except maybe in my ebook) but it also comes with something else, an expert to help you. As I mentioned at the beginning of this guide I don't sell small to medium

advertisers very much on my consulting because I don't want to charge someone thousands of dollars to get them something they could get for themselves if they just knew how and had a few of the tools. But if you aren't able to get the number you really want, you can use me as a back up if you want some professional help. I've done this for several years and have been able to help a lot of businesses get the numbers they really needed.

For smaller companies I also try to let them spread the payment out over time so they can basically use the value of the number to pay for the number. If you don't do that much advertising having a really good number is probably an expensive luxury. But if you're doing a lot of advertising it'll cost you a lot more not to have a good number than a good number ever will.

There is more information about my consulting in the Large Business section, but if you have any questions or would like any help you can call me at 1-800 MARKETER or email me at billquimby@billquimby.net but please put 800Question as the subject to make sure it goes through my spam filters.

Nearly all of the information in this guide is taken from my ebook "Phone Numbers That Make Money," which is available right on my website for FREE at www.PhoneNumbersThatMakeMoney.com. My second book "Getting Great Numbers," picks up where this guide leaves off with more details about the approaches and additional details of getting great numbers. It has more on negotiating with phone companies and end users, and even the typical transfer process and some much lesser known alternative approaches that can work in the right circumstances.

Now go get that great number for your business because it's the front door to new customers!