Auto Attendant

AUTO ATTENDANT / RESEARCH & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

How to Check Toll-Free Number Availability and Reserve One

> Get a business phone number with a simple auto attendant menu from Auto Attendant. A caller picks who they need and the call rings that person's own mobile, so nobody on your team has to publish a personal number.

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The short answer

You can check whether a toll-free number is free yourself, at no cost, on the Somos Find a Toll-Free Number page. You cannot reserve it yourself. Only a **Responsible Organization (Resp Org)**, a provider with access to the national toll-free registry, can reserve a number, and only for a real customer. Numbers go first-come, first-served (Somos Support). A reservation then lasts at most 45 days, with no extension (47 CFR 52.103(b)).

The rules below are US federal rules as of October 2026. This is educational information, not legal advice.

Canadian businesses use the same lookup: Canadian toll-free numbers sit in the same shared North American registry that Somos administers, and Resp Orgs can be based in Canada (Somos TFNRegistry Functions Tariff, sections 2.1.4 and 2.3.2). Scope limit: we could not load a primary CRTC source on Canadian toll-free rules, so the FCC rules cited below are stated as US rules and this guide does not state Canadian regulatory obligations. A Canadian business should ask its provider which terms apply.

Who controls toll-free numbers

Three parties are involved:

Who	What they do
FCC	Sets the rules. It "is not involved in the actual assignment of toll free numbers and cannot access the number database," and cannot tell you a number's status (FCC consumer guide).
Somos, Inc.	Administers the toll-free number database (the TFNRegistry) and certifies Resp Orgs (FCC consumer guide).
Resp Org (also called a Toll-Free Service Provider)	"Any person, company, or organization that manages Toll-Free Numbers in the TFNRegistry" (Somos Support). Resp Orgs reserve numbers for subscribers and manage their routing records. Many also sell toll-free service.

So if you call the FCC to ask whether 1-800-something is free, they cannot tell you. Somos can point you to its lookup and to a Resp Org. Its help desk is 1-844-HEY-SOMOS (1-844-439-7666), by call or text (FCC consumer guide).

Check availability yourself in two minutes

1. Open somos.com/find-toll-free-number.
2. Tick the codes you want to check: **800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844, 833**, or "Select All."
3. Enter "any combination of seven (7) numbers and letters." For example, `5550123` or `FLOWERS`.
4. Submit.

Somos calls this "the only tool authorized to directly connect to the entire TFNRegistry™ in real time" (Somos). The same page has a **Find a Toll-Free Service Provider** search, for when you have found a number and need someone to reserve it.

Tips for a useful search:

- **Search all seven codes at once.** Your perfect word might be gone on 800 but free on 833.
- **Try variations.** Plurals, a digit in place of a letter, a word shifted by one key.
- **Write down every match.** Availability can change between your search and your provider's reservation, because numbers go to whoever reserves first.

Reading the result: what the statuses mean

Behind every toll-free number is a status in the registry. Federal rules define them (47 CFR 52.103(a)), and Somos uses the same names (Somos NUS field descriptions). The public lookup's own display may be simpler; a Resp Org can tell you the exact status.

Status	Meaning	How long it can stay there
Spare	Available for any Resp Org to reserve	Until someone reserves it
Reserved	A Resp Org has reserved it for a subscriber	Up to **45 days**, no extension
Assigned	Routing record entered, pending activation	Up to **6 months**
Working	Live and taking calls	Indefinitely
Disconnect	Discontinued; callers hear an intercept recording	Disconnect plus transitional: **45 days to 4 months** in total
Transitional	Disconnected under four months, no intercept recording	Counts toward the same 4-month limit
Suspend	Temporarily disconnected, billing disputes only	Up to **8 months**
Unavailable	Held back for an unusual condition	Set or cleared only by the toll-free numbering administrator

Time limits: 47 CFR 52.103(b)-(f). Somos's status-transition table confirms that a reserved number reverts to Spare when the "Reserved Duration Limit, currently specified by FCC as 45 days" is reached. An assigned number goes back to Spare when the 6-month limit expires (Somos status transitions).

What this means for you:

- **Spare:** act now through a Resp Org.
- **Reserved:** someone else's provider holds it. It may come back to Spare when the 45 days run out, but only if it is never activated, and you cannot queue for it.
- **Working:** it belongs to a business using it. Your only route is a voluntary transfer by that subscriber. Buying it for a fee is prohibited brokering (see below).
- **Disconnect or Transitional:** it should return to Spare within four months of disconnection. Check back.

In the registry, a Resp Org sees a **Reserve/Disconnect Until** date: the date until which the number can stay reserved, or in disconnect or transitional status (Somos NUS field descriptions). If a number you want is in one of those states, ask your provider to read you that date.

Why you can't reserve one directly

Reserving happens inside the TFNRegistry, and only Resp Orgs have access. Somos says anyone who wants a number "should contact a Responsible Organization (Resp Org)," and that available numbers "can be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis" (Somos Support). The FCC confirms that subscribers "choose entities called 'Responsible Organizations' or 'RespOrgs' to reserve numbers on their behalf" (FCC consumer guide).

Inside the registry, a Resp Org enters the number on the Number Search and Reserve page. **Search** shows whether it is Spare. **Search & Reserve** switches it to Reserved immediately (Somos Support: specific search and reserve). A normal search there returns 1 to 10 numbers at a time, a limit Somos marks as configurable (Somos NUS field descriptions).

In practice: pick a provider that sells toll-free service, give them the exact number, and ask them to reserve it **before** you finish comparing plans. Their reservation is what protects you, not your search.

Why there is no "hold it for later"

Three federal rules stop anyone from parking numbers:

- **No extensions.** Reserved status lasts up to 45 days, and "there shall be no extension of the reservation period" (47 CFR 52.103(b)).
- **No warehousing.** A Resp Org may not reserve numbers without an actual subscriber. If it lacks "an identified toll free subscriber agreeing to be billed" for each reserved number, it is presumed to be warehousing (47 CFR 52.105). The act of reserving counts as the Resp Org certifying that such a subscriber exists.

- **No hoarding or brokering.** A subscriber may not acquire more numbers than it intends to use, and nobody may acquire a number to sell it for a fee. Routing multiple numbers to one subscriber creates a rebuttable presumption of hoarding (47 CFR 52.107).

Numbers won through competitive bidding are exempt from the warehousing and hoarding rules (47 CFR 52.105(f); 52.107(c)). The FCC's 833 auction is the example it gives (FCC consumer guide).

Two narrow exceptions exist. A Resp Org can ask the toll-free numbering administrator to place a number in **Unavailable** status when a subscriber has "special circumstances" requiring it far in advance. **Seasonal numbers** (businesses that need the line only part of the year) also go in Unavailable status (47 CFR 52.103(f)). Both go through your provider, with documentation.

Choosing a prefix

The seven toll-free codes are 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844 and 833. They "are not interchangeable": 1-800-555-0123 and 1-888-555-0123 can reach two different businesses (FCC consumer guide).

What to weigh:

- **Callers dial what they remember.** If your vanity word is taken on 800 by another business, some callers who remember only the word may dial 800 and reach them.
- **Newer codes have more choice.** Codes are opened as older ones near exhaustion. Somos was authorized to open 833 on June 3, 2017. When 855 and 844 opened, the FCC limited each Resp Org to reserving 100 numbers per day for the first 30 days (FCC DA 17-382). That was a one-time launch rule, not a current limit.
- **Check all seven before deciding.** The Somos tool lets you search them together.

What happens after you pick

1. **Your provider reserves the number** (Spare → Reserved).
2. **They build the routing record**, which tells the network where calls go (Reserved → Assigned).
3. **The record goes live** in the network databases (Assigned → Working) (Somos status transitions).
4. **You set up what callers hear:** a greeting, a menu, voicemail.

If you **already have** a toll-free number, you do not need a new one to change providers. FCC rules require toll-free numbers to be portable: a subscriber can move the number to a new Resp Org when changing service providers (FCC consumer guide). For whether you need toll-free at all, see our toll-free numbers overview and how to get a business phone number.

Common mistakes

1. **Searching, then waiting.** A search reserves nothing. Until a Resp Org reserves the number, anyone else can take it.

2. **Wrong keypad letters.** Check the word against a real keypad: 2 = ABC, 3 = DEF, 4 = GHI, 5 = JKL, 6 = MNO, 7 = PQRS, 8 = TUV, 9 = WXYZ. Letters like O and I are easy to confuse with the digits 0 and 1.
3. **Too many letters.** The lookup takes seven characters. Anything longer is not part of the number, so callers typing the full word may hit extra keys.
4. **Reserving a stack of "just in case" numbers.** Holding numbers you will not use is hoarding under 47 CFR 52.107.
5. **Paying a broker for a number.** Selling a toll-free number for a fee is brokering, which the FCC prohibits outside competitive bidding (FCC consumer guide).
6. **Letting a reservation lapse.** If routing is not set up within 45 days, the number returns to Spare and can go to someone else.

FAQ

How long does a toll-free reservation last?

Up to 45 days, with no extension (47 CFR 52.103(b)). Once a routing record is entered, the number can sit in Assigned status for up to 6 months before it must be working.

Does Somos sell toll-free numbers?

No. Somos runs the registry, certifies Resp Orgs and offers the public lookup. To get a number you go through a Resp Org or toll-free service provider (Somos; Somos Support).

Is the availability result real-time?

Somos says its lookup connects to the entire TFNRegistry in real time (Somos). But real-time is not reserved: a number that shows as available can be taken minutes later.

Can the FCC tell me who has a number?

No. The FCC says it cannot provide any information about a number's status (FCC consumer guide). Somos can help you locate a Resp Org.

Auto Attendant lets you search for a toll-free number when you pick your line, and an existing toll-free number can be moved in and answered with a menu.

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Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

1. https://www.somos.com/find-toll-free-number
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About Auto Attendant

Auto Attendant gives a small business one phone number and a recorded menu that sends each caller to the right person. The call rings the mobile that person already carries, using their normal dialler and their normal mobile plan. Pricing is a single flat monthly fee for the whole company rather than a charge for each user, and there is no app, desk phone or hardware to install.

One number, one menu, the phones you already own

A caller dials the business number, hears a short greeting and chooses an option. Each option can ring one mobile, ring several at once so whoever is free answers first, or try people one after another in a set order. There is no limit on how many people sit on the receiving end, because nobody is billed per seat. Setup is done by the owner in a few minutes: pick a number, write the greeting, and point each option at a mobile.

What it deliberately is not

An auto attendant routes a call; it does not answer one. Nobody at Auto Attendant speaks to callers, and no AI stands in for a receptionist. A business that wants its calls handled, messages taken and appointments booked wants an answering service, which is a different product at a different price. A business that needs call recording, queues, agent dashboards or CRM integration wants a contact centre platform. Auto Attendant is for the case where the call should simply reach the right pocket.

Keeping personal numbers off the internet

The business number is the only number a caller ever sees. Personal mobile numbers are never displayed and never given out, which is what lets an owner put a number on a website, an invoice, a van or a Google Business Profile without handing a personal line to everyone who finds it. An existing advertised number can be ported across and kept, and the old line keeps working while the port is in progress.

Work with Auto Attendant

Visit Auto Attendant to see how it works, how it compares to a personal mobile, Google Voice and a full phone platform, and the current pricing.

Telephone number portability, emergency calling and caller-ID rules differ by country and change over time. Articles published here describe general practice and cite primary regulator and carrier sources; they are not a guarantee of any timeline, and they are not legal or regulatory advice for a specific business.

Website: https://autoattendant.io

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