Auto Attendant

AUTO ATTENDANT / RESEARCH & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

What Happens to Your Business Number After You Cancel

> 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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What happens the moment you cancel

Educational, not legal advice. Rules are as of October 2026. Ask your provider how it handles your specific number.

When a cancellation takes effect, the provider disconnects the number. Callers stop reaching you. Usually they hear a recording saying the number is not in service. Your listings, invoices, vehicle decals and old ads still show the number, but nothing answers it.

The number is not up for grabs straight away. It goes into a holding state called **aging**. Rules in both the US and Canada keep a disconnected number out of circulation for a minimum period before anyone else can get it. Once that period ends, it can go back into the provider's inventory and be given to a new customer.

That leaves you three windows:

1. **Before you cancel.** You can still port the number to another provider. This is the easiest route by far.
2. **During aging.** The number is disconnected but not yet reassigned. Sometimes the old provider can reconnect it for you, but it is not guaranteed.
3. **After aging.** The number may already belong to someone else. Getting it back is mostly luck.

The rest of this article walks through each window.

What number aging is

In the US the rule is in the FCC's numbering rules. 47 CFR 52.15 defines **aging numbers** as "disconnected numbers that are not available for assignment to another end user or customer for a specified period of time" (47 CFR 52.15(f)(1)(ii), eCFR).

The Canadian industry guideline uses almost the same wording. Aging makes a disconnected number "temporarily unavailable for re-assignment to another customer" for a period called the aging interval. That interval starts on the day the number is disconnected (Appendix F, Canadian Central Office Code (NXX)

Assignment Guidelines).

The Canadian guideline also says why aging exists (Appendix F):

- Providers get time to finish billing and update 9-1-1 records.
- The departing customer can ask for a referral announcement that gives callers a new number.
- Fewer calls meant for the old business reach the new holder of the number.
- The departing customer can **reconnect service with the same number and the same provider** while the interval runs.

The last point is the one that matters if you cancelled by mistake. Aging gives you a window to undo it.

How long a US business number is held

Under 47 CFR 52.15, as of October 2026 (eCFR):

Number previously assigned to	Minimum aging	Maximum aging
Residential customer	45 days	90 days
Business customer	45 days	365 days

Two things follow from this:

- **45 days is the floor, not a promise.** The rule says the number may not go to another customer for at least 45 days. Your provider decides the actual hold anywhere between 45 and 365 days for a business number. Some will hold it close to the minimum.
- **The rule does not give you a right to reconnect.** It keeps the number away from other customers. Whether *you* can get it back during aging depends on your old provider's policy and systems.

So if you have just cancelled, assume the first 45 days are your safest window, and act in the first few days if you can.

How long in Canada

In Canada, the aging intervals come from Appendix F, "Aging and Administration of Disconnected Telephone Numbers," of the Canadian Central Office Code (NXX) Assignment Guidelines. The Canadian Numbering Administrator lists it among the current guideline documents (CNA, CO Codes). The version read for this article was approved on 29 April 2011, and archived copies show the same file from 2013 to 2022; as of October 2026 we found no later approved version (Appendix F):

Class of service	Minimum	Maximum
Residential wireline	1 month	3 months
Business wireline	3 months	12 months

Class of service	Minimum	Maximum
Wireless	1 month	3 months

The guideline lets the 12-month business maximum stretch to 15 months for local directory publishing dates, high-volume call-in numbers, or public service emergency numbers (Appendix F). A proposed update filed in October 2025 for thousands-block pooling keeps the same table (CSCN contribution CNCO298B, 2025).

The Canadian guideline is more explicit than the US rule in three places that help you (Appendix F):

- While a number is aging, the provider must not give it to anyone else **except** the customer who disconnected it and is reconnecting with that same provider.
- Nobody else, not even the provider, can reserve an aging number.
- When aging ends, the provider can return the number to the code holder, **or keep it reserved or held for the customer who disconnected it**.

Area codes in "jeopardy" can have shorter intervals. When an area code is close to running out of numbers, the intervals can be shortened by industry agreement or a regulatory order. In 2011, the jeopardy plan for area code 306 capped aging at two months for residential and wireless numbers and six months for business numbers (12 in special cases) (Telecom Decision CRTC 2011-418, 12 July 2011). That cap applied to 306 during that jeopardy period. It is not the national rule, but it shows a hold can be shorter than the usual table.

Toll-free numbers: 45 days to 4 months, then gone

Toll-free numbers (800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844, 833) follow a separate rule, 47 CFR 52.103. After a toll-free number is disconnected it sits in **disconnect status**, usually with an intercept recording. It may also move into **transitional status**, with no recording, for part of that time (47 CFR 52.103(a), eCFR).

The limits (47 CFR 52.103(d)):

- It must stay in disconnect or transitional status for **at least 45 days and at most 4 months**.
- "No requests for extension of the 4-month disconnect or disconnect and transitional interval will be granted."
- When the four months end, the number goes **straight to spare or unavailable status**. The company that manages it (the Responsible Organization, or RespOrg) cannot take it out of disconnect status and put it back in service at that point.

A spare number is "available for assignment by a Responsible Organization" (52.103(a)(6)). The FCC assigns toll-free numbers by competitive bidding, first-come first-served, another method, or a mix of these (47 CFR 52.111, eCFR). If your old toll-free number is easy to remember, expect someone to claim it quickly once it is spare.

Two other toll-free statuses are worth knowing:

- **Suspend status** is for numbers in a billing dispute only. It can last up to 8 months, until the number goes back to working status (52.103(e)).
- **Seasonal numbers**, for businesses that don't need the number all year, go into unavailable status at the RespOrg's request (52.103(f)(2)). If your toll-free use is seasonal, ask about this before you cancel.

Cancelled by accident: who to call and what to say

Move fast. Every day narrows your options, and no official carrier page that we found says how long a particular carrier will hold a cancelled business number. Treat any window you hear on the phone as that agent's statement, and write it down.

Step 1: Call the old provider, not the new one. Only the provider that disconnected the number can reconnect it during aging. The Canadian guideline says so directly (Appendix F). A new provider cannot port a disconnected number either. AT&T, for example, says that if you disconnect your number too soon, "you'll have to reactivate it before your request can be completed" (AT&T).

Step 2: Have these ready.

- The exact number, plus any other numbers on the same account
- The account number and the business name on the account
- The authorized contact's name and the account PIN or passcode
- The date the cancellation took effect
- A card to pay any balance or reconnection charge

Step 3: Use plain words. A script:

> "Our business line, [number], was disconnected on [date]. We want to reconnect the same number on our account. Is the number still in aging, and can you restore it today? If not today, can you place a hold or reservation on it for us while we sort this out?"

Step 4: Ask the follow-up questions.

- Is the number still unassigned?
- What will reconnecting cost, and does it restart a contract?
- Once it's reconnected, can we port it out right away? (If moving was your plan all along, this is your route.)
- Can you put a referral announcement on the line in the meantime?

Step 5: Get it in writing. Ask for a ticket number and a confirmation email. Then call the number from another phone and confirm it rings through.

If the old provider will not reconnect it, ask whether the number can be reserved for you. In Canada, the guideline lets a provider keep an aged number reserved or held for the customer who disconnected it (Appendix F). In the US, 52.15 recognizes **reserved numbers**, held at a customer's request for future use, up to 180 days (47 CFR 52.15(f)(1)(vi)). Whether your provider offers either option, and at what price, is up to them.

Port it out before it's gone

Never cancel first if you want to keep the number. Order the new service, port the number, then let the old account close.

Every official source we checked agrees:

- **FCC:** "Do not terminate your service with your existing company before initiating new service with another company" (FCC consumer guide, PDF).
- **CRTC:** "You have to ask your new service provider about keeping your phone number before you cancel your current service. You can only keep your present phone number if it's currently being used" (CRTC, Choosing a local home phone service).
- **AT&T:** "Don't disconnect your AT&T service before asking a new service provider to transfer your number" (AT&T).
- **T-Mobile:** "Your account with your previous service provider must remain active to transfer your number over. Make sure you do not cancel your account until after the transfer process has been completed" (T-Mobile).
- **Verizon (business):** "You must keep your Verizon account open, and the line must remain active until the move is completed" (Verizon Business).

Once the port completes, check the old provider's final bill and cancel any lines or add-ons you did not port. T-Mobile notes that lines you leave behind "may need to be canceled to avoid unexpected charges" (T-Mobile).

For the paperwork side, see our guide to porting your number. For realistic timing, see how long number porting takes.

What happens once the aging period ends

When aging ends, the number goes back into the provider's inventory, or back to whoever holds that block of numbers. Then it can be assigned to a new customer. For a ported number in Canada, the provider tells the national porting database, and the number "snaps back" to the original code holder, which can then reassign it (Appendix F).

From then on, the risks are practical:

- **Calls go to a stranger.** Customers who dial the number from an old invoice, a truck decal or a saved contact reach someone else's business or someone's personal phone.
- **Your listings send leads away.** Directory listings, map profiles, review sites, supplier records and old ads keep sending people to the number long after you leave it.
- **Accounts tied to the number are exposed.** If the number receives sign-in codes or is the recovery phone on bank, payment or email accounts, whoever gets it next could receive those messages. Move those settings to a working number before you cancel.
- **You start again with a new number.** You will need to reprint materials and update every listing.

Protect your number going forward

The number is often worth more than the phone service behind it. A short routine prevents most losses:

- **Put the account in the company's name.** If a departing employee or a former partner holds the account personally, a cancellation or a dispute can take the number with them. If you are buying a business, deal with this before closing; see buying a small business and transferring its phone number.
- **Keep two authorized contacts** and record the account number and PIN somewhere the business controls.
- **Keep payment current.** Watch for expiring cards on autopay. Ask your provider what happens after a missed payment and how long before a suspension turns into a disconnection.
- **Suspend or park instead of cancelling** when you close for a season. In Canada, a suspended number is not treated as disconnected (Appendix F). See seasonal business phone number parking.
- **Turn on port-out protection** where your carrier offers it. Turn it off only when you are the one moving the number.
- **Put contract end dates and renewal dates in a shared calendar**, with a reminder 60 days ahead.

Before-you-cancel checklist

- [ ] Do we want to keep this number? If yes, port it first.
- [ ] Has the port completed, and do test calls reach the new service?
- [ ] Have we listed every number on the account (main line, fax, toll-free, secondary lines)?
- [ ] Have we moved sign-in and recovery codes off this number?
- [ ] If we are giving the number up, have we asked for a referral announcement with our new number?
- [ ] Have we updated website, listings, signatures and invoices?
- [ ] Have we saved the final bill and the cancellation confirmation?

FAQ

Can I get my number back after 30, 60 or 90 days? Maybe. In the US, a disconnected business number must sit out at least 45 days. The provider may keep it out of circulation for up to 365 days (47 CFR 52.15). Whether it can still be reconnected at day 60 or 90 depends on your old provider's hold period and policy. In Canada, business wireline numbers age for 3 to 12 months under the guideline, and only you can reconnect the number with the same provider during that time (Appendix F). Call the old provider and ask.

Can anyone buy my old toll-free number? Yes, once it is out of disconnect status. That happens no later than four months after disconnection. At that point the number is spare (or unavailable), and a RespOrg can assign it to a new subscriber (47 CFR 52.103).

Does porting restart aging? No. Aging applies to disconnected numbers. A successful port moves a working number to a new provider, so it never ages. A number that has already been disconnected cannot be ported until the old provider reactivates it (AT&T; CRTC). If you later cancel a ported-in number, the provider you cancel with ages it. In Canada, the number then goes back to the original code holder (Appendix F).

Will callers hear a message during aging? Usually they hear a "not in service" recording. In Canada, you can ask for a specific announcement that gives your new number when you disconnect (Appendix F). Ask your provider whether it offers one and for how long.

Is the hold the same everywhere? No. US rules set ranges, and each provider picks a period inside them. Canadian intervals can be cut in an area code that is running out of numbers (CRTC 2011-418).

With Auto Attendant, a cancelled line keeps answering and forwarding calls until the end of the period you have paid for, and the number is released as soon as that period ends; there is no extra holding period, so port the number out before then if you want to keep it. If a payment fails, callers hear that the number is temporarily unavailable and the call ends, until the payment goes through.

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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.

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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.

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