

How to Check if a Phone Number is Active

by Amber Iven - Monday, January 11, 2021

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If your business relies on customer phone numbers, you want to make sure you only enter phone numbers that are active into your database. That way you don't waste time and money reaching out to inactive numbers.

Don't be naive and think that your customers surely wouldn't provide you with an invalid or disconnected phone number. Some people do this as a way to prevent being contacted by phone. Others provide active numbers that only later get disconnected or reassigned.

And you'd have no way of knowing. That's why it's so important for you to check if a phone number is active before adding it to your database and running your marketing campaign. We'll tell you how.

What Determines if a Phone Number is Active or Inactive?

Before we cover anything else, let's discuss what makes a number active or inactive.

Active phone numbers are numbers that are reachable. They are in use. For example, if an active number is called, it will ring, be answered, or go to voicemail. Text messages sent to active numbers will be delivered.

Inactive phone numbers cannot be reached. Calls made to inactive numbers are met with dial tones or automated messages stating that the number is not in service. It is not being used. Text messages sent to inactive phone numbers will not be delivered. The sender likely receives an error notification that the message failed.

How Phone Numbers Become Active or Inactive

Phone numbers are owned by phone carriers. Carriers lease the numbers to consumers when they are assigned. When a number is assigned, it is activated for use. These numbers are then able to receive calls and messages. A number is inactive until it is assigned.

Let's take it from the top. Your phone carrier has a list of phone numbers that it owns. Some are active and assigned to their existing clients. Others are inactive and ready to be assigned and activated.

You have one of these active numbers assigned to you. However, you decide to switch carriers maybe for better service, a better rate, a certain promotion, whatever the case may be. In some cases, you have the option to continue to use your current phone number with the new carrier. This is called **porting**.

Unfortunately, sometimes porting a number isn't possible. In this case, you abandon your number with your initial carrier. That number is no longer assigned to you, so that carrier deactivates the phone

number.

This allows it to become assigned to a new user, in which case it is activated again but for someone else. Similarly, the new carrier assigns and activates your new number with them. (Learn more about the lifecycle of a phone number [here](#).)

This all explains what happens with phone numbers that are real. Active or inactive, they are legitimate and can be assigned, unassigned, and reassigned as necessary. But it's important to consider fake numbers as well.

Other Phone Number Scenarios

In addition to real phone numbers that have not been assigned, there are other numbers that will be inactive as well.

Fake phone numbers are not listed with any carrier and are not available for use by anyone. A fake phone number will never be active or reachable. Phone numbers 555-0100 through 555-0199 were reserved around 1994 by phone companies for use in fictional scenarios such as television, radio, and literature.

Sometimes a fake phone number is necessary for certain entertainment purposes, but it is safer to use a number that is 100% inactive rather than coming up with a random number that may or may not be in use by someone. That leads to jokesters who call the number for fun and end up harassing the potential owner!

Have you ever called 867-5309? About 40 people a day had, according to poor [DJ Potter](#) who was assigned the number in 2004.

Gauging the value of the novelty, his first instinct was to sell the phone number. But as we mentioned earlier, phone numbers are owned by phone companies. So instead, to capitalize on the situation, Mr. Potter put the business the number was assigned to up for sale on eBay and confirmed with the phone company that the number would transfer.

That's the danger with using random numbers. **Random phone numbers** could be active or inactive. What's certain, though, is that a random number does not belong to the person who provides it.

Then there are invalid phone numbers. Like deactivated phone numbers, **invalid phone numbers** will not be active or reachable either. This is because they aren't formatted correctly. For example, they might have too many or too few numbers. Perhaps it is entered with a mismatching or nonexistent area code or country code. It just won't work.

Why Do You Need to Check if a Phone Number is Active?

Considering all of the information above, you might need to check if a phone number is active if you make a lot of phone calls especially for business. Here's what can happen if you don't check:

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First, think about how much it costs, both time and money, to call the numbers on your list. Now think about how much time and money you would save if you only called numbers you knew were active.

Checking your list before you begin making calls weeds out the numbers you needn't waste time and money calling. Because they won't work!

Second, if someone provides you with a random number or gives you a number that's listed on the [National Do Not Call Registry](#) (DNC), there's no way for you to know unless you check the phone number.

Third, once you check your numbers and are sure your list is accurate, you must check it again. About [30% of customer data](#) decays each year. That means that what once was accurate, verified, reliable data changes over time and must be cleaned again.

About [100,000 phone numbers](#) are reassigned every day and [30 million numbers](#) are disconnected every year. Therefore, it's important to check your list periodically to catch these changes in your data before you continue to use it.

Before we let you know the best way to check if a phone number is active and clean your data, let's take a look at how inactive phone numbers enter your database to begin with.

How Do Inactive Numbers Enter Your Database?

In the data collection process, there's always room for error. Numbers get mistyped, misread, and entered incorrectly either by the consumer or the person who handles your customer data if it isn't automated.

If you collect customer data via web forms, check out our article [How to Use Validation Error Messages to Improve Web Form Submissions](#) to help prevent incomplete and incorrect entries from being submitted into your system.

And of course, like we mentioned above, there are those people who provide fake or random numbers to avoid being contacted for marketing purposes and spam.

In most cases, you won't be able to tell whether a number is legitimate just by looking at it. Fortunately, we have solutions to help check if a phone number is active. These solutions are quick, accurate, and save you time and money in the long run.

How Do You Check if a Phone Number is Active?

The old-fashioned way to check if a phone number is active is to just call it and see what happens. That's fine if you have time and money to spare. The biggest risk here is unknowingly calling a number that's registered on the DNC list. Doing so could cost you thousands of dollars in [TCPA fines](#).

Searchbug offers two solutions to check if a phone number is active. The first is a [phone validation API](#). APIs are especially useful if you collect data via web forms because it checks the data at the point of

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entry. This prevents incorrect data from entering your database.

The phone validation API checks if the phone number is active, if it's disconnected or inactive, and whether it's registered on the DNC list. It also provides line type so you can sort your data by cell phone or landline to help with marketing strategies and only send text messages to numbers that can receive them.

The second solution is [batch verification](#). You can use this if you collect numbers outside of web forms. You take your list and run it through the batch verification system to check the validity of the numbers.

This is also the tool you will use when it's time to clean your list. Like we mentioned above, the good data you enter initially needs to be verified over time because customer data changes.

So while it might have seemed daunting to learn about all of the different ways inactive numbers can enter your database, you can rest assured that you don't have to comb through all of that data manually. Check out our data solution options [today!](#)

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