

# Reverse Phone Lookup: How to Navigate the World of Unknown Numbers

by Amber Iven - Monday, June 22, 2020

<https://www.searchbug.com/info/reverse-phone-lookup-3/>

There are many reasons to use a reverse phone lookup. It's especially helpful in identifying unknown callers. So when would you need it and how can it help you?

In 1968, Theodore George Paraskevakos began working on a caller ID prototype. He initially proposed that customers pay for the service which would be provided by an automated voice, but John Harris had the idea to display caller ID on telephone sets. In 1976, Kazuo Hashimoto developed the prototype for Harris's idea. From 1984-1989, caller ID entered households.

## Caller ID, or CNAM

Caller ID is also referred to as CNAM. So if you already have the phone number and you're looking for the CNAM (Caller ID identifier) that is usually typically the first 15 characters associated with the billing party. However, if the phone company offers an online portal, the user is often able to create a custom Caller ID "CNAM" to display a more notable identity.

CNAM, however, is not regulated by the FCC or a central database but by individual carriers who can manage their databases how they like which is why many offer users the ability to personalize the CNAM as a feature of their service. This means that the information a phone carrier provides for a call can be outdated, incorrect, or even made up.

Reverse phone lookup, on the other hand, provides the most recent information regarding the owner, location, and sometimes even email address associated with a phone number. In this article, we cover how to use reverse phone lookup to protect yourself from unknown callers and how to use it to help conduct business.

One of the main reasons businesses conduct reverse phone lookups so often is because over 100,000 phone numbers change owners every day! With that kind of turn over, your contact database can get outdated often. So, if you have permission to call or text your customer at a specific number but they changed their number, the permission doesn't stay with the original number so businesses risk [TCPA compliance](#).

## Important Uses for Reverse Phone Lookup

Reverse phone lookup is helpful on both personal and business levels. On a personal level, it's important to protect yourself from malicious unknown callers while also allowing yourself to be reached by legitimate organizations. Businesses can benefit from it by keeping their records complete and up to date. We'll tell you how!

### For Personal Safety

Unfortunately, we've all received calls from unknown numbers. Here are some common scenarios:

## YOU RECEIVE A CALL FROM AN UNKNOWN NUMBER ...



Most of us have probably experienced each of those scenarios to some extent. And the more bad experiences we have with unknown numbers, the more likely we are to start ignoring them altogether. So how can you tell if a call is worth answering? Next, we'll compare scams to legitimate calls in terms of what to expect.

### Common Phone Scams

Telephone scammers succeed because they pose as trusted officials or agencies. Scammers make promises, threats, and scare tactics to pressure you to comply.

You might get a call saying you've been awarded a government grant for a project or student loans. They will ask for your bank account information so that they can deposit the funds.

Or you get a call from someone posing as a bank representative who asks for sensitive information to confirm your identity. Afraid that your accounts are in danger, you feel pressured to provide it. Or, you get a call from the Social Security Administration warning you that your [social security number is suspended](#) and that you need to verify the information to keep it active.

Fake charities could call asking you to support a legitimate cause, but the funds never actually make their way to a real organization. Most recently, scammers have taken advantage of the coronavirus to coax unsuspecting victims to release sensitive information either to donate to help those in need or to receive

important health updates or medicine.

Scammers have also taken the liberty of posing as the IRS or FDIC to get account information from those awaiting stimulus checks or tax refunds. Thinking there might be an issue receiving the funds, those who are in desperate need may not think twice before releasing this information.

And of course, there are those scammy robocalls and telemarketers selling fake products and services over the phone. They present a great offer and in return, they get your payment information. Or perhaps you receive a call saying that you've won the lottery or sweepstakes or some large sum of money. All you need to do to receive it is to provide your account and routing numbers!

### Legitimate Calls

Above are some scary situations. How can you tell if the person calling you is really who they say they are? Especially if the number looks familiar! Unfortunately, scammers can [spooof phone numbers](#), using someone else's number to conduct their dirty business. But here's what legitimate calls will look like:

First of all, banks and government agencies will never call you to ask for your social security number or account number. They use that information to confirm your identity when *you* call *them*.

Second, legitimate callers will offer multiple ways to contact them back. Check your voicemail and email. The caller might leave a message with information regarding how to follow-up or email with instructions for logging in to your account.

Last, if you feel pressured or threatened to provide information or to act, that's a good sign that the caller is trying to coerce you to release sensitive information. Legitimate callers provide *you* with information, not the other way around.

Keep in mind that during the coronavirus pandemic, [contact tracers](#) could be trying to reach you if you've been in contact with someone who tests positive for the virus. However, they---like many other legitimate callers---will verify your identity using information from public records such as your birthdate, address, or place of birth.

### How to Protect Yourself

The good news is that you aren't powerless against scammers. When in doubt, hang up, or just don't answer. Look for follow-up information such as a voicemail or email. Check associated websites and try to find an address.

You can also add your phone number to the [National Do Not Call Registry](#). Telemarketers are heavily penalized for calling numbers on this list, so if you add your number to the registry and still get a suspicious call, there's a good chance it's illegitimate. The registry only limits telemarketers, so your doctor, bank or a political organization can still reach you via phone when necessary.

Using a [reverse phone lookup tool](#) can save you some time on research. Just plug in the unknown phone number and find out who's been trying to reach you.

A reverse phone lookup can also help you protect yourself against strangers. If you're dating and meeting new people, you might exchange phone numbers. Research the number to verify someone's identity.

### Phone Lookups For Business

Reverse phone lookup can be a helpful tool in business as well. If you have a business, you're probably always on the lookout for leads. Sometimes all you have to reach a lead or client is a phone number.

If you decide that you need more than a phone number (maybe you want to send a Christmas card), you can use [Searchbug's reverse phone lookup tool](#) to get the most recent address associated with a phone number. In some cases, the tool can even bring up an email address!

There may be instances as well where you have an old number that is no longer in service for the person you're trying to contact. With a [detailed history report](#), you can find the current number of the last person to have the old number.

Both of Searchbug's current phone owner and detailed history reports can also name the phone line type. That means that if you want to send a text message, you can tell whether a number is to a landline or cell phone beforehand.

Last, you can [append and clean your phone database](#) by searching for your contacts' information in a batch. This process appends---adds---individual or business names, street addresses, cities, states, and zip codes to the numbers in your database that have missing or outdated information.

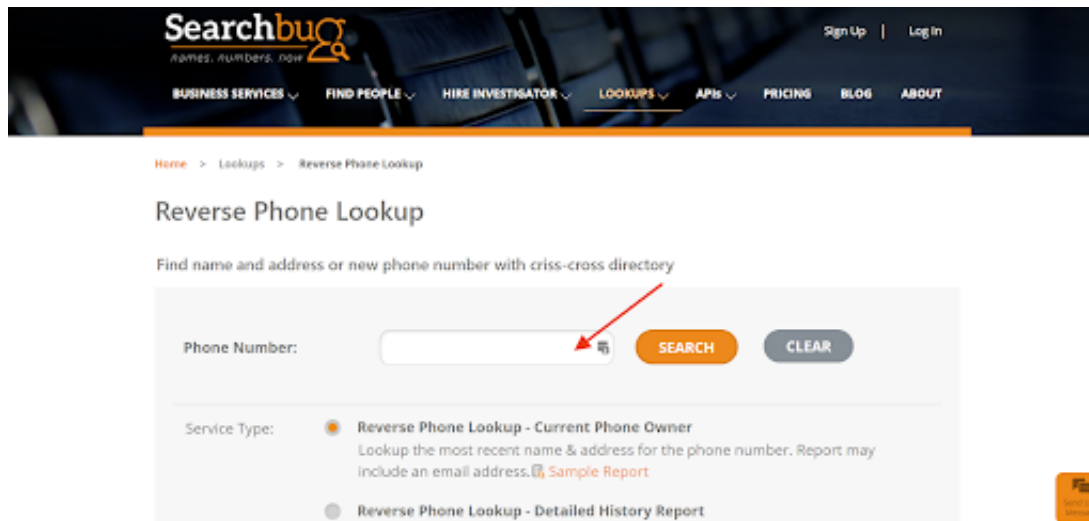
You can also do a batch search of [line types](#) to categorize your contacts based on their ability to receive certain messages or campaigns!

### How Does it Work?

Caller ID is a great invention. In most cases, it provides useful information about a caller to help determine who is trying to reach you. Unfortunately, it's not perfect.

When a call comes to your phone, it is your phone carrier's responsibility to provide you with the caller ID information. But there are many different phone carriers and all have their own databases that they regulate in their own ways---there is not one central database, and carriers are not regulated here. So information can be missing or outdated.

[Reverse phone lookup](#) provides the most up-to-date information regarding a phone number based on information pulled from public records, phone books, vital records, real estate records, magazine subscriptions, voter registration, and proprietary sources. This way you know you're getting accurate information.



All you have to do is type in a ten-digit phone number, select the option that matches your purpose, and search. Processing is real-time, so you don't have to wait forever for the results. Plus, you can conduct a search for just a dollar or two.

## What if I'm the Unknown Caller?

If you're an average Joe with a standard ten-digit number, chances are that phone carriers will at most identify the location associated with your area code and provide the recipient with that information in addition to the number you call from.

That's what the majority of calls look like when they come to our phones, and most of us are more likely to answer a number we recognize than one we don't. When caller ID provides no location information or worse, "Unknown," that's when suspicions arise.

The best way to get callers to answer you if they don't have your number saved is to be candid and honest. For example, don't block your number and don't be malicious. But, it is 2020; don't be surprised if your call goes to voicemail.... Scams are common and many people don't have time to or don't want to have a phone conversation. Just leave a genuine message with instructions for the callee to get back in touch with you.

On the other hand, if you make calls on behalf of a business, you might want to provide callees with a little more information than a phone number and location to encourage them to pick up the phone. Contact your phone company and set up your caller ID information to display your business name when you make calls.

## Don't Make This Mistake!

This month, [the FCC charged one telemarketer](#) with a \$225M fine for spoofing robocalls to sell health insurance. Here's what happened:

A telemarketer selling health insurance spoofed, or faked, phone calls using the numbers of well-known

health insurance companies. The calls claimed to be affiliated with these companies; however, when consumers expressed an interest, they were transferred to the unknown company that was actually trying to sell their own plans.

This practice broke a number of compliance regulations. Namely, spoofing is clearly illegal. It uses deception to conduct business and violates the Truth in Caller ID Act. Second, the calls made their way to millions of numbers listed on the Do Not Call Registry. This [violates the Telephone Consumer Protection Act \(TCPA\)](#) and fines for noncompliance are assigned *per call*! Spoofing is also covered under TCPA as well as deceptive telemarketing and selling without consent.

If you make calls on behalf of a business, be sure to follow all compliance guidelines to avoid legal and financial consequences. If you have a list of numbers to text or call and need to know more, be sure to [clean up and validate your phone number lists](#); prevention is a lot cheaper than a lawsuit.

### **Answer the phone with confidence. Or don't!**

Unfortunately, caller ID cannot confidently tell you who is on the other end of the phone. It really is there to help give you an idea of who might be trying to reach you. If your caller ID displays the number or name of a person or company you recognize, but something still doesn't feel right, remember our advice above for handling scam calls: hang up, do research, call back, or do a [reverse phone lookup](#) if necessary.

It's scary to think how easy it is to get scammed, but it's also relatively easy to protect yourself. Now that you know what to look for, you can answer the phone with confidence. Or don't!