

Sound Telecom  
Solaxis – A Division of Sound Telecom

## Why Use a Toll Free Number?

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### **Abstract:**

This article is focused on presenting the reader with compelling reasons for using Toll Free numbers in their business dealings. Sound Telecom and Solaxis provide Toll Free numbers as stand-alone products and in conjunction with existing services.

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One of the last great marketing questions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, "Should I get a local or a toll-free number for my business?" There are many sides to the argument, but I'll give you some viewpoints on the matter to help assist your decision-making process. A toll-free number solution can be an integral part of your communications plan.

AT&T created the first toll-free service (800 number service) in the United States 38 years ago. In the 1980's toll-free numbers began to gain prominence in businesses nation-wide. In fact, so many toll-free numbers were used that the "800" supply of prefixes was nearly exhausted and new prefixes such as "866" and "877" and "888" have been introduced.

Toll-Free service works exactly the same way as a local phone services would. You can direct and route calls to any location (home, office, cell) and have all of the multiple inbound call capacity and faxing capabilities. The primary difference is that you, the provider of the toll-free service, must pay a usage fee for all inbound calls. Rates are billed on a per minute basis and can be very economical. But the question remains, "Is a toll-free number better for my business?"

Getting a toll-free number is relatively easy. Most telephone service providers offer them. You can also find "vanity" toll-free numbers. These are numbers like, "800-CALL-NOW." They are numbers that spell a word on the dialer's telephone keypad. Vanity numbers can be very cheap or very expensive depending on the word they spell. Ultimately, a toll-free number gives your customers a way to contact your firm without having to pay for the call themselves. Customers appreciate a toll-free number, particularly in busy times when you might have to put them on hold temporarily. Also, with ever-shrinking local calling areas (LATAs), toll-free numbers ensure your customers aren't accidentally dialing a local long distance call that they did not want to make.

Having a toll-free service will enhance your productivity and increase customer satisfaction by allowing customers to reach you anytime, anywhere. It is well known that toll-free numbers build credibility with consumers. Eighty-six percent of customers will associate a toll-free number with the quality of the business products or services. By providing your customers with an 800 number option to call you, they will believe that you want to talk to them.

Another strong advantage is that you do not need to implement a new phone service, reprint all of your letterhead and business cards just because you relocate. Toll-free numbers are portable and move with your business. The entire US becomes a local calling area to your customers. Polling has shown that 90% of Americans say they use toll-free numbers on a regular basis. Toll-free numbers eliminate the need to split area codes and save you from the cost of having to deal with this in your business. Nearly all telephone exchanges are available - unlike local exchanges that have only a limited calling area.

In September of 2001, *InformationWeek* reported some amazing statistics that show 51% of households (54 million homes) now own at least one computer and 80% have Internet access. This is way up from less than half those numbers as reported in 1997. However, what needs to be put into perspective is that 94% of American homes have telephones. This means that more people are likely to purchase products and services over the telephone - especially if the number is easily accessible like a toll-free number. In fact, more than half of Americans own a cellular phone and 58% of Americans 12 years and older now own mobile phones! More than one-third of Americans estimate that they make sixty or more toll-free calls per year. Over 70% of those calls are business related, either service oriented or product purchasing. Having your own toll-free number will help you create a good customer-oriented image because of the consumer savings.

Are you still not sure if toll free numbers are right for you? Consider the following:

- 2005 marks the 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary of toll-free dialing in America (Source: Internet 800 Directory Newsletter)
- Demand for 866 numbers for business and personal use has averaged above 325,000 requests per month, since the introduction of the 888 code on March 1, 1996 (Source: Internet 800 Directory Newsletter)
- 84% of current online shoppers rely on the Web to search for product and service information to make a purchase. Giving those potential prospects a toll-free number greatly improves the success rate for sales (Source: InternetTrak)
- The average sale for a catalog-generated phone order can be 30% to 70% higher than the average mail order (Source: InternetTrak)
- A productive ad featuring an 800 number can generate approximately 30% more orders (Source: InternetTrak)
- You can decrease returns by as much as 50% by using an 800/888 number on product literature. This encourages customers to call in and resolve difficulties with a trained expert. (Source: "Telephone Marketing Report")
- 24% of television commercials contain a toll-free number, 91% using the 800 prefix and 57% of which are vanity numbers (Source: Response Marketing Group)

Toll-free usage is widespread and will only continue to grow in the future. It was once said, "50 million Elvis fans can't be wrong." Well, 50 million toll-free users can't be wrong either. If you'd like to learn more about how a toll-free number can benefit you or your business, just call us toll-free.

It won't cost you a thing.