

BusinessWeek



Think Easy Number, Not Easy Phrase

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Common marketing wisdom used to lead companies to secure vanity or custom 800 numbers to make it easier to respond. The theory was that people could remember "1-800-New-Home" and similar phrases upon encountering them in marketing promotions. Sheer ownership of such a number conveyed credibility. Promotions using vanity numbers outperformed those that did not.

But today, people who might remember a vanity phrase discover there's no way to spell it out on their cell phones, which lack the alpha characters of traditional phones. In addition, the increase of new toll-free prefixes to four has served to decrease the value of a memorable phrase, even if one is available. The unreliability of human memory makes it likely that anything other than 1-800 will lead to a high number of misdials (was it 866 or 877?), and that is not good for business. The final strike against traditional vanity numbers is that going forward not only will they fail on cell phones, but they will also fail in the "click to dial" scenarios that are part of the unified communications capability coming to us on PCs and smartphones.

Securing an easy-to-remember number for your business is still a good idea, however, if only to facilitate the transition from Googling to dialing. The key nowadays is to think in terms of easy numbers, not easy phrases. Below is a table of easy-to-remember patterns to ask your toll-free provider for, presuming 1-800-450-XXXX is the starting point:

Pattern Examples

450-XXXX (450-1111, 450-3333)
450-450X (450-4501, 450-4505)
450-XXXY (450-2223, 450-3334)
450-XYYY (450-0111, 450-4222)
450-ABCD (450-1234, 450-4321)
450-XXYY (450-2244, 450-6633)
450-XYYX (450-7117, 450-3223)
450-XYXY (450-3232, 450-5050)

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