BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Throwaway Email and Phone Numbers — A Plain-English Guide

Stand-in addresses and second numbers to cut spam and guard your real contacts

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

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Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea, if you only have a minute.

A stand-in email address or phone number is one you give out in place of your real one. Mail and calls sent to it quietly forward to you, so you still get what you want — but the company never learns your true address or number. If it later floods you with junk, you shut off that one stand-in and the spam stops at once, while your real inbox and phone stay untouched.

- For email: Apple's Hide My Email is the easiest on an iPhone, and free services like DuckDuckGo Email Protection and Firefox Relay work on any device.
- For a phone number: Google Voice gives you a free second U.S. number for calls and texts that you can hand out in place of your real one.
- Use a stand-in for sign-ups, online sellers, sweepstakes, and one-time offers — the places most likely to spam you.
- Do not use a stand-in for your bank, your doctor, the government, or security codes you might need to get back into an account.

GOOD TO KNOW

The whole system is free for normal use and set up once. After that, giving out a stand-in instead of your real details becomes a quiet little habit that saves you years of junk mail and robocalls.

> *I tell folks to think of it like a post office box for the digital world. You hand out the box number, not your home address — and you can close the box any time it fills up with junk.*

WHY THEY WANT THEM

2 Your Email and Number Are the Keys

Why everyone asks, and why it costs you.

Think about how often you are asked for an email address or a phone number. Every new account, every online order, every warranty card, every 'enter to win,' every store club at the checkout counter. There is a reason: those two details are the keys to reaching you for the rest of your life, and they rarely change.

The trouble is what happens next. Lists get shared between companies, sold to advertisers, and swept up when a company is broken into by criminals. Once your real address is out there, you cannot call it back. The junk mail and the robocalls simply keep coming, and there is no single 'off' switch.

The stand-in flips the problem around

When you give out a stand-in instead, you keep the off switch in your own hand. Each stand-in is separate, so if one starts attracting spam, you can see exactly who leaked it and shut that one down without disturbing anything else. Your real email and your real number stay quiet, shared only with the handful of people and services that truly need them.

> *The reason this works is simple: the company never had your real address to begin with. You cannot leak what you never handed over.*

HOW A STAND-IN WORKS

3 What an Alias Actually Does

No new inbox to check — it forwards to you.

The word people use for a stand-in email address is an alias, or a mask. It sounds technical, but the idea is gentle. An alias is a brand-new, oddly-spelled address — something like k7p2name@duck.com — that belongs to you but hides your real one behind it.

Here is the part that surprises people: you do not have to check a second inbox. Anything sent to the alias forwards automatically into your normal email, right alongside your other mail. You read it and reply as usual. The company on the other end only ever sees the alias, never your real address.

One alias per place is the trick

The real power comes from making a different alias for each company. Give the hardware store one, the newsletter another, the sweepstakes a third. If junk starts pouring into the one you gave the sweepstakes, you know exactly who sold your information — and you can switch that single alias off like a light, with no effect on the others.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A second phone number works the very same way. Calls and texts to it ring through to your phone through an app, but the caller never learns your real number. Hand it out freely; keep the real one for family and the people who matter.

APPLE HIDE MY EMAIL

4 The Easiest Alias on an iPhone

Built in, and free when a site offers Sign in with Apple.

If you use an iPhone or iPad, Apple has a stand-in built right in, called Hide My Email. When you sign up for a new account and the site shows a 'Sign in with Apple' button, Apple offers to create a random, unique address that forwards to your real inbox. The site gets the random address; your true one stays private.

Apple's own description is plain: it generates unique, random email addresses that automatically forward to your personal inbox, and you can read and reply to them normally. The stand-in addresses end in @privaterelay.appleid.com or @private.icloud.com.

Using it when you sign up

1. When a website or app shows the 'Sign in with Apple' button during sign-up, tap it.
2. Choose 'Hide My Email' rather than sharing your real address.
3. Apple creates the random address and uses it for that account.
4. Mail sent to it arrives in your normal inbox — no second place to check.

You can review every address Apple has made for you. On an iPhone or iPad, open Settings, tap your name, then tap 'Sign in with Apple' to see which apps and websites use a hidden address.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> This free, built-in version works only through the 'Sign in with Apple' button. To create a hidden address on demand for any form — even one without that button — you need iCloud+, Apple's paid subscription. iCloud+ also lets you change which inbox the mail forwards to.

ALIASES ANYWHERE

5 Free Ways to Mask Email on Any Device

Not on an iPhone? You still have good, free choices.

You do not need an Apple device to use stand-in email. Several free services give you forwarding addresses that work from any computer or phone. Here are the ones worth knowing, all with a free tier as of late 2026.

DuckDuckGo Email Protection

A free service that gives you a personal @duck.com address. You can generate fresh, unique addresses on the spot, and it strips hidden advertising trackers out of your mail before forwarding it to your real inbox. Simple and genuinely free.

Firefox Relay

From the makers of the Firefox web browser. The free tier gives you five email masks that forward to your real address, with a browser button to create them as you go and tracker removal included. Paid tiers add unlimited masks and a phone mask.

SimpleLogin and Gmail's built-in tricks

- SimpleLogin is another free-tier alias service, handy if you want a dashboard to manage a modest set of masks in one place.
- If you have Gmail, you already have a free trick: add a plus sign and a label to your address, like yourname+store@gmail.com. Mail still reaches you, and you can filter or spot who leaked it.
- Gmail also ignores dots in your address, so yourname@gmail.com and your.name@gmail.com reach the same inbox — a lighter way to vary what you hand out.

WATCH OUT

The Gmail plus-sign and dot tricks are easy, but they do not truly hide your real address — a determined company can strip the extra part off and find your base name. For real hiding, use a forwarding service like DuckDuckGo or Firefox Relay.

A SECOND NUMBER

6 A Second Phone Number, Free

Google Voice and the other ways to get one.

A second phone number does for your phone what an alias does for your email: it gives you something to hand out so your real number stays private. The best-known free option is Google Voice.

Google Voice — free and flexible

Google Voice gives you a real U.S. phone number for calls, texts, and voicemail, used through an app or a web browser. If you are in the U.S., you can even choose your own number by area code. Almost all calls to the U.S. and Canada are free, and it transcribes your voicemails into text you can read like email. You will need a regular phone that can receive one text, to confirm it is really you during setup.

Other ways to get a second number

- A second line from your own cell carrier: most carriers sell an extra number for your existing phone for a monthly fee — simple, but not free.
- A second-number app: various apps offer an extra number for a small monthly or yearly cost, which can be handy if you want it fully separate from your main accounts.
- A cheap prepaid phone: an old-fashioned 'burner' still works if you want a number with no ties to you at all.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> For most people, Google Voice is the sensible starting point: it is free, it is a real number, and it runs alongside your normal phone service rather than replacing it. Give the Voice number out; keep your carrier number for family and essentials.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

SETTING UP A NUMBER

7 Setting Up Google Voice

A one-time setup, then it lives on your phone.

Setting up Google Voice takes about ten minutes and uses your existing Google account — the same one behind Gmail, if you have that. You only do this once.

1. Install the Google Voice app from your phone's app store, or go to the Google Voice website on a computer.
2. Sign in with your Google account, then review and accept the terms to continue.
3. Tap Search to find a number. You can search by city or area code; if none are free there, try a nearby area.
4. Next to the number you like, tap Select, then follow the prompts.
5. Confirm the text message Google sends to your regular phone, so it knows the number is yours.

From then on, your second number lives in the app and on the web. Calls and texts to it come through the app, your voicemails arrive as readable text, and your real carrier number stays out of sight.

TIP

Set up Google Voice while you are sitting with your regular phone nearby, since you will need to read one verification text to finish. After that, the second number simply works.

WATCH OUT

A Google Voice number is not meant for emergencies. Calling 911 through it does not work the dependable way a normal phone or landline does. Always use your regular phone for emergency calls.

WHEN TO USE ONE

8 When to Reach for a Stand-In

The places most likely to spam you.

A good rule of thumb: the less you trust a place to leave you alone, the more a stand-in makes sense. These are the everyday situations where a junk address or second number earns its keep.

- New online accounts and apps, especially ones you may only use once.
- Online sellers and marketplace buyers or sellers you do not know personally.
- Sweepstakes, 'enter to win' forms, and free samples — these exist largely to collect contact details.
- Store loyalty clubs and 'we'll email your receipt' counters.
- Free downloads, coupons, and newsletters you want once but not forever.
- Warranty registrations and 'sign up to see pricing' gates.

In each of these, the company's real goal is often to keep marketing to you. Hand over a stand-in, enjoy the thing you came for, and let any later junk pile up in a corner you never have to look at.

> *If a cashier or a website is a little too eager for your email, that eagerness is your answer. That is exactly the moment to give the stand-in.*

WHAT NOT TO DO

9 What to Never Use a Stand-In For

The accounts where your real details must stay.

This is the most important page in the guide, so I will be direct. A stand-in is wonderful for junk, but using one in the wrong place can lock you out of something that truly matters. For anything serious, use your real, permanent email and your real phone number.

Use your real details for	Use a stand-in for
Banks and credit cards	Store loyalty clubs
Doctors and insurance	Online sellers
Government and taxes	Sweepstakes and coupons
Security codes and recovery	Newsletters and sign-ups

Why these in particular

- Banks, doctors, insurers, and the government send you time-sensitive and legal mail you cannot afford to miss or lose access to.
- Security codes — the short numbers a site texts or emails to let you back in — must go somewhere you will always control. If they go to a stand-in you later retire, you can lock yourself out.
- Account recovery is the big one: the email and number tied to getting back into an important account should be your real, lasting ones, never a throwaway.

WATCH OUT

Never, ever point an account's recovery email or recovery phone number at a stand-in you might shut off. If you lose that stand-in, you may lose the account with it. Recovery details are the one place a throwaway has no business being.

THE CODE SNAG

10

The 'Verify With a Code' Snag

Why some sites reject a second number — and what to do.

Now and then a website will not accept your stand-in. The most common case is the verification code — the short number a site texts or emails to confirm you are real. Two snags come up, and both have easy answers.

Some sites block internet numbers

Certain services refuse numbers like Google Voice because they are internet-based rather than tied to a traditional carrier. If a site says it cannot text your code to that number, that is usually the reason. For that one site, simply use your real carrier number to receive the code.

Codes that land in a retired alias

If you set up an account using a stand-in email and later turn that alias off, any future codes sent to it vanish. This is exactly why account logins and recovery belong on your real address. If you already have an account on a stand-in, go into its settings and switch the login email and phone to your real ones before you retire the stand-in.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A clean way to think about it: a stand-in is for mail you want to be able to walk away from. The moment a service becomes something you would hate to lose access to, move it onto your real details.

KEEPING TIDY

11

Managing and Retiring Your Stand-Ins

The quiet upkeep that keeps it all working.

Stand-ins need very little tending, but a few good habits keep the whole system calm and useful over the years.

Label them so you remember who got what

Most alias services let you add a note to each address — 'hardware store,' 'that sweepstakes,' 'the newsletter.' A quick label now saves you from guessing later when you are deciding whether to shut one off. A second number needs no label; it is just your one spare.

Retiring a stand-in that fills with spam

1. Open the service's dashboard or app — Hide My Email settings, your Relay or DuckDuckGo page, or the Google Voice app.
2. Find the alias or number that is attracting the junk.
3. First make sure no account you still care about uses it to log in or to send codes.
4. Turn it off, deactivate it, or set it to stop forwarding.
5. The spam to that stand-in stops at once, and nothing else is touched.

TIP

Before you retire a stand-in, pause on that one question: does any account I still use rely on this to log in or receive codes? If yes, move that account to your real details first, then retire the stand-in.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you stop checking a junk email account entirely, that is usually fine — the whole point is that you do not have to. Just keep the account open rather than deleting it, so that any mail still forwarding from it continues to reach you.

COMMON QUESTIONS

12 Common Questions

The things people ask me most.

Does spam still slip through sometimes?

A little can, yes. No system is perfect, and a stand-in forwards whatever is sent to it. The difference is that when one stand-in gets noisy, you can shut off that single address and the noise ends — something you can never do with your real, shared

address.

Can I reply to mail sent to my alias?

Yes. Forwarded mail arrives in your normal inbox, and you reply as usual; the service keeps your real address hidden on the way back out. With a second phone number, you text and call back from the app, and your real number stays private.

Is any of this against the rules?

No. Using a stand-in address or a second number for ordinary sign-ups, shopping, and marketing is perfectly normal and allowed. You are simply choosing what to share. The only caution is the honest one from this guide: keep your important accounts on your real details.

What about when I travel?

Stand-ins are a traveler's friend. A trip can otherwise scatter your real contact details across a dozen one-time services — hotel Wi-Fi pages, tour bookings, rental counters. A stand-in for each keeps your real inbox and phone from filling up with foreign junk afterward.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Set each tool up once and it is available on all your devices thereafter. There is no need to repeat the setup every time; the habit of handing out the stand-in is all that is left to do.

IS IT FOR YOU

13 Your Visit — and My Promise

A simple way to decide, and a hand if you want one.

Here is the short version of how I help folks decide. You do not need every tool in this guide. Start with one email stand-in and one second number, and you have already cut off most of the spam at its source.

- On an iPhone? Start with Hide My Email for sign-ups, and add Google Voice for a free second number.
- On a computer or Android phone? Start with a free DuckDuckGo or Firefox Relay address, plus Google Voice.
- Keep one simple rule in mind: real details for banks, doctors, government, and recovery; stand-ins for everything else.
- Label your stand-ins as you go, and retire any that get too noisy.

The beauty of it is that it costs nothing for normal use, it is set up once, and from then on it quietly protects you every time someone asks for your email or number — which, as you have surely noticed, is constantly.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you would like a hand, I am glad to come by and set the whole thing up with you: a stand-in email for sign-ups, a free second phone number, labels so you remember who got what, and a careful check that your banks, your doctor, and your important logins all stay on your real, permanent details. We will make it a small, calm project — tech made simple, service made personal.

> *You should not have to hand your real phone number to every form on earth just to buy a garden hose. A stand-in or two, set up once, and the spam mostly stops knowing where you live.*

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this
Hide your email on an iPhone	Use Apple's Hide My Email when a site offers Sign in with Apple
Mask email on any device	Set up a free DuckDuckGo or Firefox Relay forwarding address
Get a free second number	Set up Google Voice and pick a number in the app
When to use a stand-in	Sign-ups, online sellers, sweepstakes, one-time offers
When to use the real one	Banks, doctors, the government, and security codes
Retire a spammy stand-in	Turn off the alias or deactivate the number — spam stops cold
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

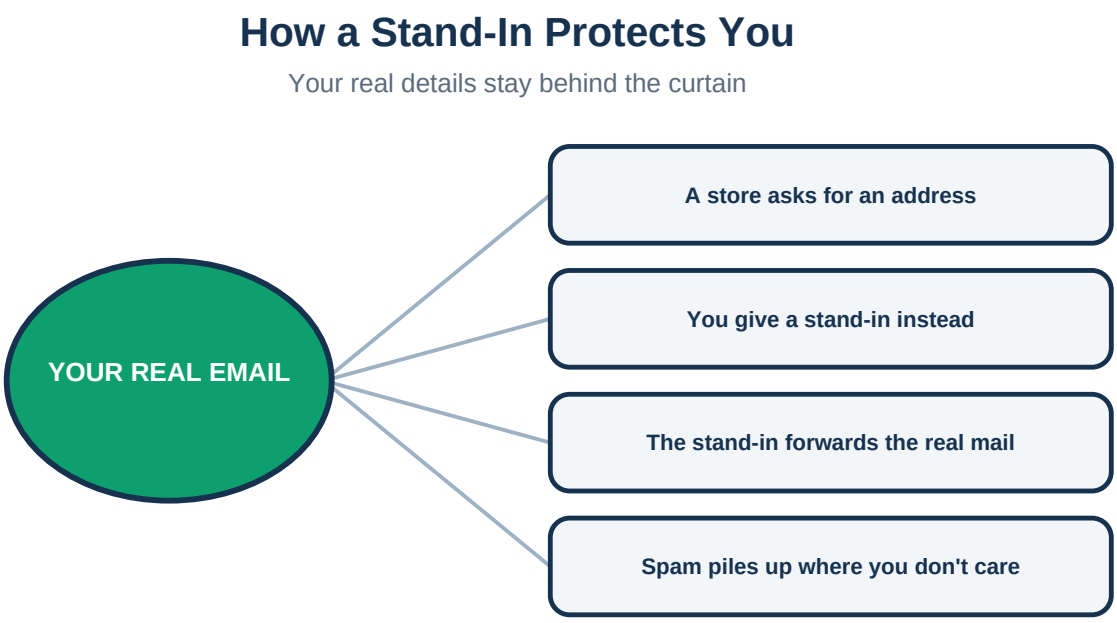


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Giving Out a Stand-In

The everyday habit, start to finish

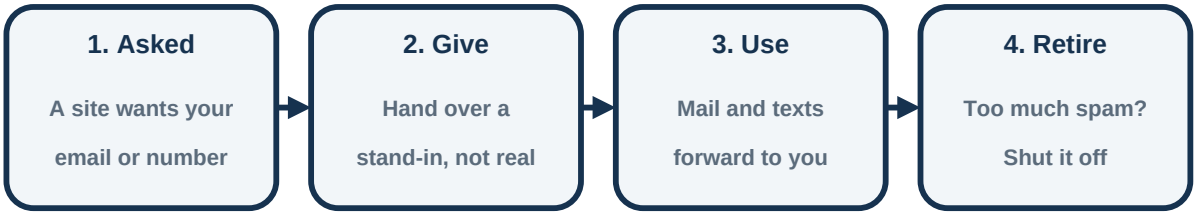


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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