BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Google Voice

A free second phone number, voicemail you can read and calls from your computer — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for seniors, families and small sellers

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For free Google Voice on phones and computers · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to Google Voice: the free service that gives you a second U.S. phone number that rings your existing phone, works on your computer, and turns voicemail into text you can read. It's written for folks who want a number to hand out without giving away their real one — for selling online, for a small business, or just for peace and quiet — and for the family members who help them. Read it in any order and at your own pace. One chapter matters more than all the rest: Chapter 18, about the Google Voice code scam. Please read that one even if you never sign up.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What Google Voice is, what you need before you sign up, and how to pick your new number.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Maybe you're selling a recliner online and don't want strangers to have your cell number. Maybe you run a small business from the kitchen table and want a separate line. Maybe you'd just like your voicemail to show up as words you can read. Google Voice can do all of that, and the basic service doesn't cost a penny.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help folks here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain Google Voice sitting at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything.

What this guide will do for you

- Explain what Google Voice is, what it isn't, and what you need before you start.
- Walk you through choosing your new number and linking it to the phone you already have.
- Show you how to call and text from your phone *and* from your computer.
- Set up voicemail you can read, a greeting in your own voice, and spam filtering.
- Explain the rule that can make you lose your number if you don't use it, and how to keep it.
- Warn you, clearly, about the Google Voice code scam that catches online sellers every day.

The big promise: you can't break it

You can't hurt your phone or your Google Account by looking around Google Voice. Settings can be turned on and off again, greetings can be re-recorded, and a blocked number can be unblocked. The few things that call for real care — deleting your number, moving it to another company, and sharing a code — are clearly marked.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A second number is like a post office box for your phone. You can hand it out freely — on a sale listing, a business card or a sign-up form — and keep your real cell number for family and friends.

SCAM ALERT

The one thing to remember

If anyone you don't know asks you to read them a six-digit code "to prove you're real," stop. That's the Google Voice code scam. Never share a code with someone who contacted you. Chapter 18 explains it.

And I'm only a phone call away

If anything in this guide leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question.

Let's start with the simplest question: what *is* Google Voice?

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What Google Voice Is (and Isn't)

Google Voice is a phone service from Google that runs over the internet. It gives you a real U.S. phone number that people can call and text like any other. Calls to that number can ring the phone you already have, the Google Voice app, and your computer, all at once.

The pieces, in plain words

Piece	What it is
Your Google Voice number	A second phone number, with an area code you choose. It belongs to your Google Account.
The Voice app	A free app for iPhone and Android phones. You call, text and check voicemail in it.
voice.google.com	The website. Sign in on any computer to call, text and read voicemail on a big screen.
Linked number	A phone you already own — usually your cell — that rings when someone calls your Google Voice number.
Voicemail transcript	Google turns each voicemail into written words, so you can read it instead of listening.

What Google Voice isn't

- **It isn't a cell phone plan.** You still need your own phone service or internet. Google Voice rides on top of it.
- **It isn't for 911.** The free version can't call emergency services. Always use your regular phone for 911. Chapter 25 explains.
- **It isn't for mass texting.** It's meant for one-to-one, personal conversations. Sending lots of identical texts can get your messages blocked.
- **It isn't a toll-free number.** Google Voice doesn't offer 1-800 numbers.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One number that follows you: answer on your cell when you're out, on your computer at your desk, and read your voicemail anywhere. If you change cell companies, your Google Voice number doesn't change.

GOOD TO KNOW

Free and paid versions

This guide is mostly about the **free** Google Voice for personal use. Google also sells paid versions for businesses with extra features. Chapter 24 covers those briefly.

CHAPTER 3

What You Need Before You Start

Getting a Google Voice number takes about fifteen minutes. Before you begin, gather these few things. Doing it at a computer is easiest, with your cell phone beside you.

The checklist

- **A personal Google Account** — the same one you use for Gmail or YouTube. If you don't have one, you can create one free. (Work or school accounts can only use Voice if the organization sets it up.)
- **An existing U.S. phone number you can get a code on.** Google sends a code to it to confirm it's yours. This becomes your first linked number.
- **Being in the United States.** The free version is offered only in the U.S. and only for personal, consumer use. You can't sign up while you're outside the country.
- **A few minutes to confirm who you are.** Google now asks people who request a new number to complete an identity check. Until that's done, the new number can't make or receive calls or texts.

GOOD TO KNOW

Which phone number works for sign-up

Volunteers on Google's own help forum report that the first sign-up step works best with a U.S. **cell phone** number from a regular carrier, and that many landline and internet-phone numbers aren't accepted for it. A number that has already been used to claim a Google Voice number may not work again. If Google won't accept your number, that's usually why.

About the identity check

Google says the identity check is there to stop spam and abuse and to meet regulators' standards. Have your **legal name**, a **government-issued photo ID** (such as a driver's license) and your **address** ready, and make sure the photo of your ID is clear and matches what you typed. Some checks finish right away; others go to a person for review, which can take up to 3 business days. If Google can't verify you, it will tell you, and you may be able to try again — so take your time and do it carefully the first time.

HEADS UP

Only on Google's own website

Do the identity check only inside Google Voice itself, at **voice.google.com** or in the Voice app. If a text, email or caller asks you to send ID to "verify your Google Voice," it's a scam.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With these ready, sign-up goes smoothly in one sitting instead of stalling halfway.

CHAPTER 4

Setting Up and Choosing Your Number

Now the fun part: picking your number. You can pick an area code near you — 330 here in Portage County, or 234, which also serves our area — or one somewhere else entirely.

Getting your number on a computer

1. On a computer, type **voice.google.com** into the address bar yourself.
2. Sign in with your Google Account.
3. Read and accept the terms and privacy policy if asked.
4. Search for a number by **city** or **area code**. If nothing is available, try a neighboring area code.
5. Choose **Select** next to the number you want, and follow the steps.
6. Google asks for an existing phone number to verify. Enter your cell number and choose to get a code.
7. When the text arrives, type the code into the Google Voice screen yourself. That code is for **you only**.
8. Finish any identity check Google asks for (Chapter 3).

> **TIP**
>
> **Write your new number down now**
>
> Your Google Voice number isn't printed anywhere else. Write it on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 28, and save it in your phone's contacts as "My Google Voice."

Getting your number on a phone

1. Install the **Google Voice** app from the App Store (iPhone) or Google Play (Android). Check that the maker is **Google LLC**.
2. Open it and sign in with your Google Account.
3. Search for a number by city or area code, and choose the one you want.
4. Verify your existing number with the code Google texts you, and finish any identity check.

Choosing a good number

- **Local looks friendlier.** Neighbors are more likely to answer a 330 or 234 number than one from far away.
- **Easy to say.** If you'll read it aloud often, look for one with repeating digits.
- **You can change it later** by deleting the number and choosing another (Chapter 22) — but people who have the old one will lose you, so choose with care.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

In a few minutes you have a real phone number you can give out without giving away your own.

PART 2

Using It Every Day

The app and the website, making calls from your phone and your computer, and sending texts.

CHAPTER 5

The App or the Website: Which to Use

Google Voice works in two places, and they share everything. A text you send from the computer shows up in the app on your phone, and a voicemail you read on your phone is marked as read on the computer.

	The Voice app (phone)	voice.google.com (computer)
Best for	Calls and texts on the go	Reading voicemail and texting with a real keyboard
What you need	iPhone or Android phone, Wi-Fi or cell data	Chrome, Edge, Firefox or Safari, plus a microphone and speakers or a headset
Calls use	Wi-Fi or data — or your carrier minutes (Chapter 6)	Your internet connection
Settings	Menu (three lines, top left) > **Settings**	**Settings** (the gear, top right)

Finding your way around

Both have the same four main sections, shown as tabs or a list on the side:

- **Calls** — every call made and received, with a button to call back.
- **Messages** — your text conversations.
- **Voicemail** — each message, with a play button and the written transcript.
- **Contacts** — Google Voice uses the same contacts as your Google Account.

TIP

Use both

Many people set up and adjust Google Voice on the computer, where the screen is bigger and the settings are easier to read, then use the app day to day.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your calls, texts and voicemail are in one place no matter which screen you pick up. Lose your phone? Your messages are still there on the computer.

CHAPTER 6

Making Calls from Your Phone

When you call from the Voice app, the person you're calling sees your Google Voice number, not your cell number. That's the whole point, so it's worth getting this right.

Placing a call

1. Open the **Voice** app.
2. Tap **Calls**, then the dial pad or the call button.
3. Type a number or a name from your contacts, and tap **Call**.

HEADS UP

Start the call from the Voice app

If you dial from your phone's regular Phone app, the call goes out from your real cell number and uses your plan's minutes. To show your Google Voice number, start the call inside the Voice app.

Wi-Fi and data, or your carrier

The app can carry calls over Wi-Fi or cell data, or hand them to your phone company like a normal call. You choose:

1. In the Voice app, tap **Menu** (top left) > **Settings**.
2. Tap **Making and receiving calls**.
3. Choose **Prefer Wi-Fi and mobile data** to use the internet, falling back to your carrier minutes when there's no Wi-Fi or data; or choose **Use carrier only** to always use your phone company.

TIP

Which to choose

If you have a good cell signal and plenty of minutes, either works. If your cell signal is weak at home but your Wi-Fi is strong, **Prefer Wi-Fi and mobile data** often sounds better. If calls sound choppy on Wi-Fi, try **Use carrier only**. On iPhone the wording may be slightly different.

What calls cost

When you're calling from the U.S., almost all calls to the U.S. and Canada are free. A few numbers in rural or independent phone areas cost a penny a minute. Calls to other countries cost a per-minute rate you pay with prepaid credit (Chapter 23).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can return calls to a buyer, a contractor or a customer without ever revealing your real number.

CHAPTER 7

Calling from Your Computer

This is one of Google Voice's nicest features. Your computer becomes a phone: you talk through its microphone and hear through its speakers or a headset.

What you need

- A computer with a current version of **Chrome**, **Microsoft Edge**, **Firefox** (Windows or Mac) or **Safari**. Google supports the current release and the one before it.
- A working microphone and speakers. A simple headset with a microphone sounds best and avoids echo.
- A steady internet connection.

Making a call

1. Go to **voice.google.com** and sign in.
2. Click **Calls** on the left.
3. Type a name or number in the box on the right, or use the dial pad, and click **Call**.
4. The first time, your browser asks to use your microphone. Choose **Allow**.

Answering a call on the computer

When voice.google.com is open in a browser tab, an incoming call pops up on screen. Click to answer. If calls never ring on the computer, check that the website is allowed to use the microphone, show notifications and play sound.

> **TIP**
>
> **If the other person can't hear you**
>
> In browsers other than Chrome, set the **microphone**, **notifications** (alerts) and **sound** or **autoplay** permissions for voice.google.com to **Allow**. In Chrome, allow microphone access. Then reload the page.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Long calls are easier with a headset than holding a phone to your ear, and you can look things up on the same screen while you talk. It's also handy if your cell signal is poor indoors.

CHAPTER 8

Texting with Google Voice

Texts sent from Google Voice come from your Google Voice number. Replies come back into the Voice app and the website, not your phone's regular Messages app.

Sending a text

1. In the app or at voice.google.com, open **Messages**.
2. Tap or click **Send a message** (or the new-message button).
3. Type a name or number.
4. Type your message and send it.

Group texts

You can add up to **7** names or numbers to a group text, for 8 people in all, counting you.

Things Google Voice texting won't do

- **Short codes.** You can't text five- or six-digit "short code" numbers, the kind banks and stores use for alerts. Many sign-in codes from companies come from short codes, so they may not reach a Google Voice number.
- **Bulk messages.** Google Voice texting is meant for one-to-one personal conversations. Sending many texts quickly, sending the same message to lots of people who don't reply, or getting marked as spam can get your texting temporarily restricted.
- **Very long messages.** On the website, messages longer than 160 characters to non-Google Voice numbers are split into several texts.

HEADS UP

Keep your real cell number on important accounts

Because short-code texts often don't arrive, don't make your Google Voice number the phone number your bank, pharmacy or Google Account sends security codes to. Google doesn't allow a Google Voice number as a Google Account recovery phone at all. Keep your real cell number for those.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can text a buyer, a client or a club member from a number that isn't your personal one, and read and answer from a full-size keyboard on your computer.

PART 3

Voicemail You Can Read

Listening to messages, reading them as text, and recording a greeting in your own voice.

CHAPTER 9

Voicemail and Transcripts

When someone leaves a message on your Google Voice number, Google saves the recording *and* turns it into written words, called a **transcript**. You can read the gist in seconds, then listen if you want to hear the voice.

Checking your voicemail

1. Open the Voice app, or go to **voice.google.com**.
2. Tap or click **Voicemail**.
3. Choose a message. The transcript appears on screen.
4. Tap **Play** to listen to the recording.

Turning transcripts on or off

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings** (the gear, top right).
2. Click **Voicemail** on the left.
3. Turn **Voicemail transcripts** on or off.

When the transcript is wrong or missing

Transcripts are done by computer, so they're usually close but rarely perfect. Names, addresses and phone numbers are the parts most often garbled. If there's a lot of background noise, or the message isn't in English, you may see **Transcript not available**. Just play the recording.

TIP

Always listen to anything important

Use the transcript to decide *which* messages need your attention, then play the recording for anything with a phone number, an appointment time or an amount of money.

SCAM ALERT

A voicemail is not proof

A message saying "this is your bank" or "this is Google" may not be. Don't call back a number left in a voicemail about money or your accounts. Look up the real number yourself, on the back of your card or the company's own website.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

If hearing on the phone is hard, transcripts let you read your messages at your own pace. You can also have them emailed to you — see "Ways Google Voice Can Make Life Easier."

CHAPTER 10

Recording Your Greeting

Until you record a greeting, callers hear Google's standard one. A greeting in your own voice reassures people they've reached the right person — and it's a good place to say what the number is for.

Recording a greeting on a computer

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**, then **Voicemail** on the left.
2. Next to **Voicemail greeting**, choose to **Record** a greeting.
3. Allow the microphone if your browser asks.
4. Click record, speak your greeting, then stop. Play it back to check it.
5. Save it. Your new greeting becomes the **active** one callers hear.

Recording a greeting in the app

1. In the Voice app, tap **Menu** > **Settings**.
2. Under Voicemail, tap **Voicemail greeting**.
3. Tap **Record a greeting**, speak, stop, and save.

Good to know about greetings

- A greeting can be up to **3 minutes** long. On a computer, Chrome and Firefox allow the full 3 minutes; Safari stops at one minute.
- You can keep up to **10 greetings** and choose which one is active — handy for a "back next week" message.
- To switch, use **Manage all greetings** on the computer and choose **Set as active** next to the one you want.

TIP

A simple greeting that works

"Hi, you've reached Mary at 330-555-0100. Please leave your name, number and a short message, and I'll call you back." Short, clear, and it confirms the number. (That's a made-up example number — use your own.)

HEADS UP

Leave private details out

Don't say your home address, that you're away on vacation, or that you live alone. Your first name and the number are plenty.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Callers know they've reached you, so they're more likely to leave a message instead of hanging up.

PART 4

Where Your Calls Ring

Linked phones, choosing which devices ring, screening callers, rules for certain people, and Do Not Disturb.

CHAPTER 11

Linked Phones and Call Forwarding

A **linked number** is a phone you already own that rings when someone calls your Google Voice number. The phone you verified at sign-up is your first one. You can add others, such as a spouse's cell or a home phone.

Adding another linked number

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**.
2. Under **Account**, find **Linked numbers** and click **New linked number**.
3. Type the phone number.
4. For a cell phone, Google texts a code. For a landline, choose **Verify by phone**; Google calls that phone and reads a code aloud.
5. Type the code into the screen yourself, and confirm.

The rules

- You can link up to **6** numbers.
- You can't link a number that's already linked to a different Google Voice number.
- To get the code, you need the phone in your hand. That's on purpose: it proves the phone is yours.

Stopping calls to one linked phone

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**, then **Calls**.
2. Under **Call forwarding**, turn off any number you don't want to ring.

Turning forwarding off doesn't remove the number from your account. You can turn it back on any time.

SCAM ALERT

A code to link a phone belongs to the phone's owner

Linking is exactly what the Google Voice scam abuses: a stranger tries to link *your* phone to *their* account and needs you to read them the code. If you ever receive a Google Voice code you didn't ask for, don't share it. Chapter 18 has the full story.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Callers dial one number, and it rings wherever you are — your cell, the house phone, or both.

CHAPTER 12

Choosing Which Devices Ring

Besides linked phones, a Google Voice call can ring the Voice app on your phone and the website on your computer. If calls ring in too many places, or not in the place you want, here's where to look.

In the app

1. In the Voice app, tap **Menu** > **Settings**.
2. Under **Calls**, tap **Incoming call options**.
3. Under **My devices**, turn off any device you don't want to ring.

On the computer

In **Settings** > **Calls**, look at **Call forwarding** for your linked numbers and the option for receiving calls on the website. Turn on only the places you actually answer.

TIP

A sensible starting setup

Many people let calls ring both their cell (as a linked number) and the computer while they're at the desk. If you only want Google Voice calls on your cell, turn the website off.

GOOD TO KNOW

If nothing is turned on

If you turn off every device and every linked number, all calls go straight to voicemail. That's a quick way to make the number "messages only."

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your phone rings when and where you want — not on a computer in an empty room.

CHAPTER 13

Screening Calls

Call screening means Google Voice asks callers you don't know to say their name before your phone connects them. You hear the name and decide whether to answer. It's one of the best defenses against robocalls and pushy salespeople.

Turning on call screening

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**, then **Calls** — or in the app, tap **Menu** > **Settings** and look under **Calls**.
2. Turn on **Screen calls**. It applies to all your devices.

What happens when a call comes in

- Callers who aren't in your Google Contacts are asked to say their name.
- People in your contacts aren't asked; Google Voice announces their name for you.
- Businesses Google already knows, such as ones listed on Google Maps, are announced without being asked.

After you hear who it is, you choose:

Key	What it does
Press 1	Accept the call and talk.
Press 2	Send the caller to voicemail. You can listen while they leave the message.
Press * (star)	While listening to them leave a message, jump in and talk.

TIP

Save the people you know

Screening works best when friends, family, doctors and the pharmacy are saved in your Google Contacts. Then only true strangers are asked to give a name.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Robocalls usually hang up rather than say a name, and you get to decide before you say hello.

CHAPTER 14

Rules for Certain Callers

Custom call forwarding lets you set special rules for particular contacts. For example: calls from your daughter always ring your cell, calls from a certain number always go to voicemail, or a favorite customer never gets screened.

Making a rule (on a computer)

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**, then **Calls**.
2. Find **Custom call forwarding** and choose to create a new rule.
3. Choose the contact or contacts the rule is for.
4. Pick what happens: forward their calls to certain linked phones, or send them straight to voicemail.
5. Under **Screen the call**, choose **No preference**, **Always screen** or **Never screen**.
6. You can also give these callers their own voicemail greeting. Save the rule.

GOOD TO KNOW

Only the first rule counts

Rules are checked in the order they're listed. If one contact is in more than one rule, only the first rule in the list applies to them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The people who matter most always get through, and the ones you'd rather not talk to never ring at all.

CHAPTER 15

Do Not Disturb

Do not disturb sends every incoming Google Voice call straight to voicemail. It's perfect for naps, dinner, church, or the hours after you close up shop.

Turning it on in the app

1. Open the Voice app and tap **Menu** (top left) > **Settings**.
2. Under **Do not disturb**, turn on **Do not disturb**.

Turning it on at the computer

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**.
2. Click **Do not disturb** on the left and turn it on.

While it's on, a **yellow banner** shows at the top of the Voice screen as a reminder. Turn it off the same way.

HEADS UP

Don't forget to turn it back off

Do not disturb stays on until you turn it off. If people say you never answer, check for the yellow banner first.

GOOD TO KNOW

It only affects your Google Voice number

Calls to your real cell number aren't affected. For quiet time on the whole phone, use your phone's own Do Not Disturb or Focus setting as well.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Business or sale calls wait politely in voicemail until you're ready, while your real phone stays open for family.

PART 5

Staying Safe and Spam-Free

Blocking callers, filtering spam, spotting the tricks aimed at your new number, and the Google Voice code scam.

CHAPTER 16

Blocking Callers and Filtering Spam

Once your Google Voice number is out in the world — on a sale listing or a business card — some junk calls and texts will find it. Google Voice gives you two simple tools: an automatic **spam filter** and a **block** button for any number you never want to hear from again.

Turning on the spam filter

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings** (the gear, top right) — or in the app, tap **Menu** > **Settings**.
2. Scroll to **Security**.
3. Turn on **Filter spam**.

With the filter on, calls, texts and voicemail from numbers known for spam go into a separate **Spam** folder instead of ringing you or landing in your messages.

Blocking one number

1. Open the call, text or voicemail from that number.
2. Tap or click **More options** (three dots).
3. Choose **Block number** and confirm.

Calls and messages from a blocked number are marked **Blocked**. When that number calls you, the caller hears a message that your number is **not in service**.

Marking spam, and fixing mistakes

- **Mark as spam.** From the same **More options** menu, choose to mark a call or text as spam. Future calls and messages from that number go to the Spam folder.
- **Not spam.** If Google flags a call from someone you know, open it and choose **Not spam**.
- **Unblock.** Open the conversation again, choose **More options**, and choose **Unblock number**.
- **Check the Spam folder now and then.** In the app it's under **Menu** > **Spam**. A doctor's office or a real buyer can occasionally land there.

TIP

Pair it with call screening

The spam filter catches numbers Google already knows are bad. Call screening (Chapter 13) catches the rest by asking strangers to say their name. Together they stop most junk.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your real cell number needs its own protection

These settings only cover calls to your Google Voice number. For your regular cell phone and home phone, use your phone's own spam blocking and your carrier's free filter. Our guide to spam calls and robocalls walks through those.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your new number stays useful instead of becoming one more line full of robocalls.

CHAPTER 17

Tricks Aimed at Your New Number

When you post a Google Voice number on a sale listing, a lost-pet flyer or a rental ad, you're inviting strangers to contact you. That's the whole point, and most people who reach out are just who they say they are. But scammers watch those same listings. A few warning signs come up again and again.

Warning signs in a call or text

- **They want a code.** Any request to read back a code that was just texted to you. This is the big one, and Chapter 18 covers it.
- **They want to move the conversation.** "Text me at this other number" or "email me instead" right away, before any real questions about the item.
- **They offer to overpay.** A buyer who sends more than the price and asks you to send the difference back — or to pay their "mover" or "shipper."
- **They're rushed and far away.** Can't see the item, can't meet in person, but must buy today.
- **They pressure you.** Urgency, guilt or flattery instead of normal questions.

Safe habits

- Keep the conversation on the marketplace's own messages or your Google Voice number. Don't switch to a number or email a stranger gives you.
- Meet in a public place, in daylight, for local sales. Many police stations have a safe exchange spot.
- Take payment in a way that can't bounce or be reversed later, and never "refund the difference."
- If something feels off, stop replying. You don't owe anyone an explanation.

SCAM ALERT

A lost-pet flyer is a favorite target

Scammers watch lost-pet posts and call saying they've found the animal. They may ask for a code "to prove you're the owner," or ask for money up front. A real finder will send a photo and meet you. Never share a code and never pay before you see your pet.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

If a stranger turns out to be trouble, they only ever had your Google Voice number — not your real one. You can block them, or even change the number, and your personal line stays private.

CHAPTER 18

The Google Voice Code Scam

Please read this chapter even if you never set up Google Voice yourself. This scam targets anyone who posts a phone number online — sellers, pet owners, landlords and people offering services — and it works because the request sounds so reasonable.

How it goes

1. You post something online with your phone number: a couch for sale, a lost dog, a room for rent.
2. A "buyer" or "finder" texts you. They seem friendly and interested.
3. They say they've been scammed before, so they want to make sure *you're* real. "I'm going to send you a code. Just read it back to me."
4. A text arrives from Google with a six-digit code. It may even say it's a Google Voice verification code and warn you not to share it.
5. You read them the code. They thank you — and often disappear.

What really happened

The scammer was signing up for Google Voice using **your** phone number as the number to verify. Google texted the code to you, because it's your phone. When you read it back, you proved to Google that the scammer "owns" your number. Now they have a Google Voice number linked to your name and phone, which they can use to scam other people while hiding who they really are.

In worse versions, the code isn't for Google Voice at all. It's the sign-in code for **your** email, bank or social media account, and the scammer is trying to get into it.

SCAM ALERT

The rule that stops it every time

Never share a verification code with anyone who contacted you. Not a buyer, not a "finder," not someone claiming to be from Google, your bank or the government. No honest person needs a code that was sent to your phone. The FTC puts it plainly: anyone who asks for your verification code is a scammer.

What to say instead

You don't need to argue or explain. A simple "I don't share codes. Happy to meet at the police station's safe exchange spot if you'd like to see it" is plenty. A real buyer won't mind. A scammer will vanish.

HEADS UP

If a code arrives that you didn't ask for

Don't share it, and don't tap any link in the message. Somebody may be trying to use your number. Just ignore it. If it was a code for one of your own accounts, check that account and change its password (Chapter 19).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing this one trick protects your phone number, your accounts and your good name — and lets you warn friends and family who sell things online.

CHAPTER 19

If You Already Gave Someone a Code

If you're reading this because you already read a code to a stranger, please don't feel foolish. This trick is designed to sound reasonable, and it catches careful people every day. What matters now is taking a few calm steps.

First, work out what the code was for

Look at the text message the code came in. It usually says which company sent it.

- **If it mentioned Google Voice,** the scammer most likely set up a Google Voice number linked to your phone. Your own accounts may be fine. Follow the steps below to take your number back.
- **If it was for your email, bank, Facebook or another account,** treat that account as at risk. Sign in to it yourself right away, change the password, and check its security settings. If you're locked out, use that company's official account recovery. For your bank, call the number on the back of your card.

Taking your phone number back from a scammer's Google Voice

You do this by claiming your phone number into a Google Voice account of your own. When you do, Google removes it from the other account.

1. On a computer, go to **voice.google.com** and sign in with **your own** Google Account. If you don't have a Google Voice number yet, you'll be asked to set one up first (Chapter 4).
2. Click **Settings**. Under **Account**, find **Linked numbers** and click **New linked number**.
3. Type the phone number the scammer used — your cell number.
4. Google tells you the number is being used by another account and asks whether you want to claim it. Choose to claim it.
5. Google sends a code to your phone. Type it into the screen yourself — this time it's you using it.
6. Confirm. Your phone number is now linked to your account, not the scammer's.

Then, a few more good steps

- **Report it** to the Federal Trade Commission at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**. It takes a few minutes.
- **Report the buyer** on the marketplace or website where you met them, and block them.
- **Turn on 2-Step Verification** for your Google Account and your email if it isn't on already. Our guide to your Google Account explains how.
- **Watch for strange messages** from friends saying "you called me" — a sign the scammer used the number. Reclaiming it stops that.

GOOD TO KNOW

If Google won't let you claim it

Sometimes Google refuses, for example if that phone number has already been used to verify Google Voice before. Volunteers on Google's help forum can sometimes help, and so can I. Don't pay anyone who contacts you offering to "recover" your number — that's a second scam.

FROM BILL

Want a hand with this?

This is one I'm glad to sit down and do with you: check your accounts, claim the number back and turn on 2-Step Verification. Call **(330) 200-8042**. **$49 remote · $99 in your home**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your number is back in your hands, nobody can hide behind it, and your accounts are locked up tighter than before.

PART 6

Keeping Your Number

The use-it-or-lose-it rule, moving a number in or out of Google Voice, and changing or deleting your number.

CHAPTER 20

Keeping Your Number Active

Here's the rule that surprises the most people. Because the free service gives out real phone numbers, Google takes back numbers that aren't being used, so they can go to someone else. If you set up Google Voice for one sale and then forget about it, the number can quietly slip away.

The rule, in plain words

- Google says it may take back a number that isn't used as intended — such as **placing calls or sending text messages** — for **3 months**.
- Before that happens, Google sends a warning to your Gmail and shows a **reclaim date** in Google Voice: the date the number will be removed.
- After the reclaim date, your old messages stay in your account, but you can't make or get calls or texts on that number.
- You then have **45 days** to get it back. After that, it may be gone for good.

The easy way to keep it

Make one outgoing call or send one text from your Google Voice number every month or so. Calling a friend or a family member and chatting for a minute is plenty.

TIP

Put it on the calendar

Add a repeating reminder on your phone's calendar on the first of each month: "Send one text from Google Voice." Text a family member "Just keeping my number alive!" and you're done.

HEADS UP

Answering calls may not be enough

Google's rule names *placing* calls and *sending* texts. Don't count on incoming calls or listening to voicemail to keep the number. Make sure something goes *out* now and then.

If you got a warning, or the number already expired

1. On a computer, go to **voice.google.com** and sign in.
2. If you see the warning, simply make a call or send a text from your Google Voice number right away.
3. If the number was already removed and you're inside the 45 days, follow the on-screen prompt to get it back. Google asks you to link and verify a phone number with a code sent to that phone. Type the code in yourself.

GOOD TO KNOW

Want to keep it for sure?

If you'd rather never worry about the 3-month rule, you can move the number to a regular phone company (Chapter 21) or use a paid Google Voice plan (Chapter 24). For most people, a monthly text is the simplest answer.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The number you printed on your business cards or gave to your customers keeps working, year after year.

CHAPTER 21

Moving a Number In or Out (Porting)

Porting means moving a phone number from one company to another, so you keep the number but change who provides the service. Google Voice lets you do this in both directions. Each has a small fee and a couple of traps worth knowing first.

Moving your cell number into Google Voice

Some people move their old cell number into Google Voice so they can keep it forever — for example, when giving up a second line. But think carefully: **once your cell number moves to Google Voice, your cell plan for that number ends.** Your phone will need a new number from your carrier to keep working as a cell phone.

- Google Voice only accepts numbers from **mobile** carriers. A landline number can't be moved in directly.
- As of November 2026 the cost is a one-time **$20**. If the move gets stuck and you cancel it, the $20 is refunded.
- You'll need your current carrier's **account number** and **port-out PIN**. Your carrier's app or customer service can give you these.

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**. Under **Account**, choose **Port a number**.
2. Type the number and verify it with the six-digit code sent to that phone.
3. Enter your carrier account details and pay the fee.
4. **Don't cancel your old phone plan** yourself. Wait until Google Voice says the move is complete.

Moving your Google Voice number to a phone company

If you'd like your Google Voice number to become a regular cell or home phone number, you first **unlock** it in Google Voice, then ask the new company to move it.

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**. Under **Account**, click **Unlock** next to your number.
2. Pay the fee: **$3.00** as of November 2026, or nothing if the number was originally moved in from another carrier.
3. Contact the new phone company and ask to bring your number over.
4. When they ask for an account number and PIN, give them your **10-digit Google Voice number** as the account number, and your **Google Voice voicemail PIN** as the PIN.

5. **Don't delete** the Google Voice number while the move is happening. It can take up to 48 hours.

GOOD TO KNOW

Changed your mind?

You can lock the number again in Settings, as long as the new carrier hasn't already contacted Google to start the move.

SCAM ALERT

Your port-out PIN is like a house key

Scammers sometimes try to move people's numbers to a phone they control, so they can receive bank codes. Never give your carrier PIN or your Google Voice PIN to anyone who calls or texts you. Only use it yourself, when *you* started the move.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You're never stuck. A number you've used for years can come with you if you change how you get your phone service.

CHAPTER 22

Changing or Deleting Your Number

If a number attracts too much junk, or a stranger from a sale won't leave you alone, you can give up your Google Voice number and choose a new one. With the free service you have one Google Voice number at a time, so changing means deleting the old one first.

HEADS UP

Think before you delete

Everyone who has your old number — customers, clubs, the doctor's office — will no longer reach you on it. You can only get a deleted number back for a limited time, so tell people your new number before you make the switch, and don't delete a number you've printed on business cards on a whim.

Deleting your number (on a computer)

1. At voice.google.com, click **Settings**.
2. Under **Account**, find **Google Voice number**.
3. Click **Delete**, then **Delete number**, and confirm.

Choosing a new number

1. After deleting, you'll see a message that you don't have a Google Voice number. Click **Get a number**.
2. Search by city or area code, and choose the one you want (Chapter 4).
3. Verify your linked phone with the code Google sends, and finish any steps on screen.

On your phone

In the Voice app, tap **Menu** > **Settings**, then look under **Account** for your Google Voice number and the option to delete it.

TIP

Before you delete, save what matters

Write down any numbers or details from old texts and voicemail you want to keep. Then you won't need to go looking for them later.

GOOD TO KNOW

Deleted it by mistake?

Go back to voice.google.com right away. For a limited time after deleting, Google may offer to give you the same number back. The sooner you try, the better.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A fresh start in a few minutes, without touching your real cell number or changing phone companies.

PART 7

Costs, Business Use and Limits

Calling other countries, paid plans for small businesses, what Google Voice can't do in an emergency, and fixing common problems.

CHAPTER 23

Calling Other Countries and Google Voice Credit

Calls within the U.S. and Canada are almost always free (Chapter 6). Calls to other countries cost a small amount per minute, paid from **Google Voice credit**: money you add to your account ahead of time, like a prepaid phone card.

Checking the rate first

Rates are different for every country, and often different for cell phones and landlines in the same country. Before you buy credit, look up the country under **Calling rates** in Google Voice's settings or help pages. Google shows the per-minute price.

Adding credit

1. On a computer, go to **voice.google.com** and click **Settings**.
2. Click **Payments** on the left.
3. Click **Add credit**, choose an amount, and pay with your Google payment method.

You can also turn on **auto-recharge**, which tops up your credit automatically when it runs low. If you call overseas only now and then, it's simpler to leave that off and add credit by hand.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **On an iPhone**
>
> You can't add credit in the iPhone or iPad app. Use voice.google.com on a computer, then make the call from whichever device you like.

Good to know about credit

- Credit is only used for calls and texts that cost money, mostly international ones.
- It stays with that one Google Account. It can't be moved to another account or used for other Google services.
- You can ask for a refund of a call or of your remaining balance within **6 months** of buying it, from the billing part of Payments.

- If you're traveling abroad and call home, Google charges international rates, and your cell company may add its own roaming charges unless you're on Wi-Fi.

TIP

Calling family overseas for free

If your family abroad has a smartphone, a video or voice call in an app you both use, such as WhatsApp or FaceTime, is usually free over Wi-Fi. Google Voice credit is handy for calling landlines and businesses overseas.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You know the price before you dial, and you never get a surprise bill — you can only spend the credit you put in.

CHAPTER 24

Paid Google Voice for Sellers and Small Businesses

The free Google Voice is for personal use, and it works fine for an occasional seller. If you run a real business, Google also sells paid versions with extra features and support. You don't need them to get started, but it's good to know they exist.

The paid choices, as of November 2026

Plan	Price	Who it's for
Voice Starter (on its own)	$10 a month	One person with a personal Gmail account who wants premium calling features and 24/7 Voice support
Voice Standard (on its own)	$20 a month	One person who also wants an automated phone menu ("press 1 for...") and AI call notes
Voice with Google Workspace	$10, $20 or $30 per user per month (Starter, Standard, Premier)	A business that uses Google Workspace email, with several people answering phones

The standalone plans are for U.S. numbers. The Workspace plans are added to a Google Workspace subscription, which is a separate monthly cost. Prices and promotions change, so check Google's own page before you buy.

What paying gets you

- **Emergency 911 calling** with a registered address (Chapter 25). The free version doesn't have this.
- **Real support** from Google, instead of volunteers on the help forum.
- On higher plans, an **automated menu** for callers, calls that ring several people, and more.
- Business use is allowed. The free version is for personal, consumer use.

TIP

My honest advice

If you sell a few things on Facebook Marketplace or at craft fairs, the free version is plenty. If your business depends on the phone ringing — customers, appointments, staff — a paid plan or a business phone service is worth a look. Our guide to business phone systems compares options.

HEADS UP

Finish any move first

If you're in the middle of moving a number into Google Voice (Chapter 21), Google asks you to finish or cancel it before you can buy a standalone plan.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can start free, and grow into a paid plan later without changing the number your customers know.

CHAPTER 25

911 and Other Things Google Voice Can't Do

This is the most important limit in the whole guide, so it gets its own chapter.

STAY SAFE

Free Google Voice can't call 911

The free, personal Google Voice **cannot** place calls to 911 or other emergency services. In an emergency, always use your phone's regular **Phone** app, or a landline. Make sure everyone in your household — and any babysitter or visitor — knows this.

Why this matters

If you get used to making all your calls from the Voice app, it's easy to reach for it out of habit. On a cell phone, the regular Phone app can always dial 911, even if you're out of minutes. A computer with only voice.google.com can't call 911 at all.

And on paid plans

Paid Google Voice plans can call 911, but even then Google warns that emergency calling won't work during a **power outage**, if your **internet** is down, or if Google Voice itself is having an outage. The 911 operator may also assume you're at the last address you registered, so keep it up to date if you move.

Other things it won't do

Won't do	What that means
Short-code texts	Can't text 5- and 6-digit numbers. Many bank and store alerts won't arrive (Chapter 8).
Account recovery	Can't be used as your Google Account recovery phone. Use your real cell number.
Toll-free numbers	Google Voice doesn't give out 1-800 numbers.
Outside the U.S.	You can't sign up for the free version from another country.
Mass texting	Not allowed. Sending many identical texts can get texting turned off.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the limits ahead of time means Google Voice never lets you down when it matters most.

CHAPTER 26

When Something Isn't Working

Most Google Voice problems come down to a handful of settings. Work down this list in order; it usually only takes a few minutes.

Calls stopped ringing

1. **Look for the yellow banner.** If **Do not disturb** is on, every call goes to voicemail (Chapter 15). Also check your phone's own Do Not Disturb or Focus.
2. **Check your devices.** In the app, tap **Menu** > **Settings** > **Incoming call options** and make sure the devices you want are turned on under **My devices**.
3. **Check your linked phone.** If Google Voice says **Your linked number is inactive**, tap **Reverify** and type in the code Google texts you.
4. **Check the Spam folder and blocked numbers.** The caller may have been blocked by mistake (Chapter 16).
5. **Check other call-blocking apps** on your phone, which can interfere.

Calls don't ring on the computer

- Keep the voice.google.com tab open. If it sits untouched for a long time, the browser may put it to sleep, and calls won't ring. Click on it now and then.
- Make sure the site is allowed to use your microphone, show notifications and play sound (Chapter 7).

Calls don't come through on an Android phone

Make sure the Voice app is allowed to send notifications and run in the background. Battery-saving settings can stop it from waking up for a call.

Other common problems

Problem	What to do
A sign-in code text never arrived	It probably came from a short code. Use your real cell number for that account (Chapter 8).
Got a warning about losing the number	Make a call or send a text from Google Voice today (Chapter 20).
The number is gone	If it expired, you may have 45 days to get it back (Chapter 20). If you deleted it, try right away (Chapter 22).
Forgot your Google password or locked out	Use Google's own account recovery at accounts.google.com. Our guide to your Google Account walks through it.
Someone used your number for Google Voice	Claim it back into your own account (Chapter 19).

SCAM ALERT

Don't search for a "Google Voice phone number"

The free Google Voice has no phone support line. Search results and ads that show a "Google Voice support" phone number are usually scammers who will ask for codes, remote access or payment. Use Google's help pages at support.google.com/voice, or call someone you trust.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Most problems are fixed in minutes from your own chair, without waiting on hold.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary of your Google Voice essentials.

CHAPTER 27

When to Call Bill

Most of what's in this guide you can do yourself, at your own pace. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time or worry. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Getting set up** — choosing a number, getting through the identity check, linking your cell, and installing the app on your phone and the website on your computer, all working on day one.
- **Making it quiet** — spam filter, call screening, a greeting in your voice and Do Not Disturb hours, set up the way you like.
- **You think you gave someone a code** — checking your accounts, claiming your number back and turning on 2-Step Verification together (Chapter 19).
- **Moving a number** in or out of Google Voice, without losing service along the way (Chapter 21).
- **Your number expired or calls stopped ringing** and the steps in Chapter 20 or Chapter 26 didn't fix it.
- **Deciding whether a small business needs a paid plan** or a different phone service.

What I don't do

I can't override Google's rules — if Google won't release a number or approve an identity check, nobody outside Google can force it. I'll help you understand what Google is asking for and try every honest route. I also never need your passwords written down or your codes read to me; you'll type those yourself while I guide you.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, explain what I'm doing in plain words, and never talk down to anyone. I'll tell you honestly when something isn't worth your money, including paid plans you don't need. I've been doing this kind of work for more than 30 years, and I serve Portage County, Ohio, in person, and folks farther away by remote help.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is yours to keep for free; if you'd like a hand, I'm only a phone call away.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thank you for taking the time to learn this. A second number is a small thing that can bring a lot of peace of mind. Take it one step at a time.

— Bill

CHAPTER 28

Your Google Voice Cheat-Sheet

The whole guide, boiled down to one page.

The essentials

Topic	What to remember
Where to use it	The Voice app on your phone, or voice.google.com on a computer
Cost	Free for personal use. U.S. and Canada calls are almost all free.
Calls to other countries	Per-minute, from prepaid credit (Settings > Payments)
Keep your number	Make a call or send a text from it at least once a month. Google can take back a number unused for 3 months.
Expired?	You have 45 days after the reclaim date to get it back
Linked phones	Up to 6. Settings > Account > Linked numbers
Spam	Settings > Security > Filter spam. Block from More options.
Screening	Settings > Calls > Screen calls
Move in / out	$20 to move a cell number in; $3.00 to unlock your number to move out (as of November 2026)
911	**Not** on free Google Voice. Use your regular Phone app.
Codes	**Never** share a code with anyone who contacted you

Write it down once

Item	Mine
My Google Voice number	_____
Google Account email it's on	_____
Where my password is safely kept	_____
My linked phone number(s)	_____
My Google Voice voicemail PIN is kept	_____
Monthly reminder to send a text set for	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. **Someone asked for a code?** Stop. Don't share it. If you already did, go to Chapter 19.
2. **Calls not ringing?** Check for the yellow Do Not Disturb banner, then your devices and linked phones (Chapter 26).
3. **Warning about losing the number?** Send a text from Google Voice today (Chapter 20).
4. **Junk calls?** Turn on Filter spam and Screen calls (Chapters 13 and 16).
5. **Emergency?** Use your regular Phone app to call 911.
6. **Still stuck?** Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 or book at billshometech.com/book.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Everything you need, in one place, so you're never left wondering where a setting lives.