

How to Stop Robocalls

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Robocalls - we all seem to get them these days. And locally, with our large student population from China and Taiwan, Ithaca has its own special kind of madness; robocalls in Chinese! The technology and cost to create and make these kinds of calls is simple and incredibly cheap - hence all the calls at all hours. Here, Hewlett Packard provides some of the basics in attempting to reduce this annoying part of everyones day.

How often do you find yourself at your desk in the middle of a critical, time-sensitive project only to have your concentration shattered by the ear-piercing ring of your mobile phone?

You look down and see your friend, “Scam Likely,” calling once again. He must be a good friend because you hear from him at work at least twice a day, and he seems relaxed enough to call at the most inopportune times. You want to end your connection with him – given his rude interruptions – but you’re not quite sure how to do it.

The first thing you need to know is that you’re most likely dealing with isn’t a person at all but a robocall. What is that? Well, if you answer your mobile phone and hear what sounds like it might be a previously recorded message, it is most likely a robocall.

And it could very well be an unlawful attempt to reach you.

The [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC) says that, unless a company has your written permission – or “opt-in” – to call you, it is out of bounds. Indeed, FTC rules only allow certain robocalls, such as those for political, charitable and debt collection purposes.

Nonetheless, YouMail estimates that [4.7 billion robocalls blew up phones in December 2018](#), with the average person receiving 14.3 unsolicited calls. Not surprisingly, robocalls have also become the top consumer complaint in the nation, [according to the FTC](#).

Here are four tips to keep those pesky calls at bay:

1. Take advantage of features offered by your wireless carrier.

Each of the major U.S. wireless carriers provides a call-blocking feature for their customers. Keep in mind that some of these are free, and some are not. Here’s a quick list:

- **T-Mobile** began offering its [Scam ID and Scam Block](#) in 2017, reportedly becoming the [first carrier to aggressively target the robocall problem](#). Scam ID alerts you when a robocall is coming from a likely scammer. Scam Block heads off likely scammers before they can bug you. You can enable the feature in your T-Mobile account, in the latest Name ID app, or by dialing #662# from your T-Mobile phone. For an extra \$4, you can also add the Name ID feature to view names of incoming callers. T-Mobile's programs have been making some headway. Last July, it [announced](#) it had blocked 3.5 billion scam calls and warned customers about 15 billion 'Scam Likely' calls since the program's inception.
- Verizon, meantime, offers customers [Call Filter](#), which includes spam detection, a spam filter and the chance to report random numbers for free. For an additional \$2.99 per month, the feature also includes caller ID, spam lookup, and a personal block and spam list.
- AT&T has also weighed-in with [Call Protect](#), an application that can be activated for free. It automatically blocks calls from numbers flagged as "fraudulent." The free version blocks calls from potential spammers, identifies telemarketing calls and lets you add unwanted callers to your block list. For an extra \$3.99 per month, you can also get caller ID for unknown numbers.

2. Download a third-party call-blocking app.

Another way to prevent robocalls on your phone at work is to download a call-blocking app. These apps act as filters, using call data from users to predict which calls are scams. They then stop calls from reaching your device.

To get a call-blocking app, visit the app store for your device's specific operating system (Android, iOS, etc.) and review consumer ratings to make the best choice. There are also plenty of expert reviews available online for various call-blocking apps, as well as a list at [ctia.org](#).

The key is to find an app that works on your device, provides automatic call blocking and spam alerts and can report a number if a call gets through. Other apps worth investigating include [Hiya](#), [Nomorobo](#), [YouMail](#) and [RoboKiller](#). Some of these apps are free while others involve a small monthly fee.

3. Register your number.

Add your mobile number to the [National Do Not Call Registry](#), which frequently stops telemarketers from calling your registered number.

4. Report offending calls.

File a complaint online with the [FTC](#) or [FCC](#), or use [donotcall.gov](#) to report the number on your caller ID. Even if the number appears fake, it's worth reporting. The FTC analyzes this data to identify illegal callers based on calling patterns. You can also forward spam text messages to 7726 (or SPAM), a free text exchange with your wireless provider that will report the number. While it won't immediately block the number from texting you again, it will help your carrier investigate its origins to try to put an end to it.

The Bottom Line

While none of these tips will completely eliminate robocall disturbances, it's crucial to understand that you will have to put in a little sweat equity to minimize their effect.

From being proactive with unknown calls, and utilizing an app or wireless carrier service, you can – at the very least – minimize the total number of robocalls calls and spam you receive in the immediate future until a more permanent solution comes along.