

Who's Calling? Here's What You Need to Know Before Picking Up the Phone

By Jason Cohen, pcmag.com, Updated August 19, 2025

Getting a random call from an unknown number? Here's how to do a reverse phone lookup.

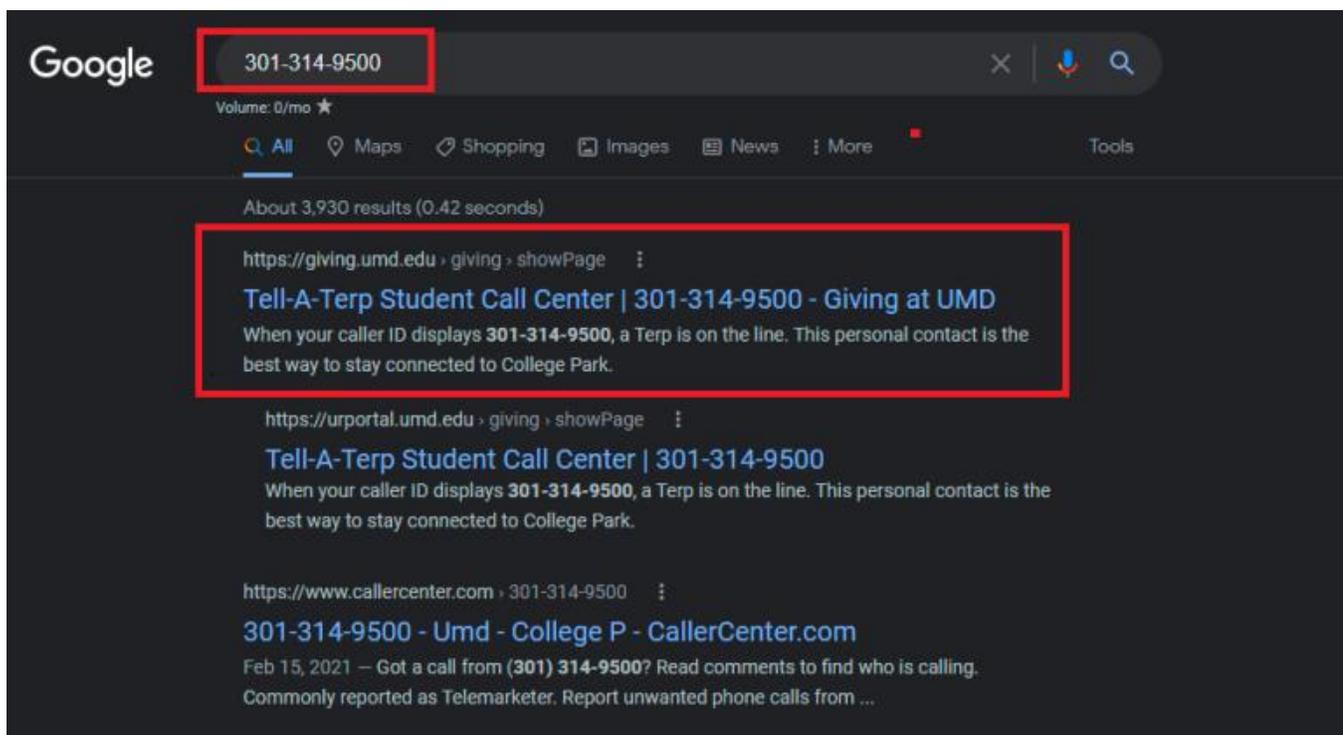
The phone rings and it's a number you don't recognize. Or perhaps an unknown number shows up in your missed calls. You're curious, but you don't want to pick up or call back if it's a telemarketer or scammer. Instead of playing robocall roulette, here are a few ways to investigate who's calling you before you engage.

Legit Call vs. Scam Call: How to Tell the Difference

You may have noticed that America has a problem with scam calls. Scammers [took \\$10 billion](#) from unsuspecting victims in 2023, and it's hard to see the problem going away anytime soon. If you get a call, there are a few ways to tell if it's legit or not.

- **What does the phone say?** When a call comes in, look for a displayed number and location. If your phone isn't showing any information and says something like Unknown, chances are there's a scammer on the other end of the line. Anyone can hide their number, but best to let this one go to voicemail and call back if it's someone you know. If the phone says Scam Likely, it's typically correct; feel free to ignore the call.
- **Look for verification.** Carriers have started verifying phone numbers when you receive a call. Google's phone app also [adds a badge on incoming calls](#) that it can attach to a business. Unfortunately, this doesn't verify every call from a legitimate business or weed out legitimate businesses that use robocalls.
- **Watch out for spoofed numbers.** Have you ever gotten a call from what looks to be your own phone number, only it's a few numbers off? Don't pick those calls up; scammers like to spoof phone numbers and trick you into picking up. The idea is that you're more likely to pick up if you think the call is coming from your area code or from someone you know.

Search the Web



(Credit: Google)

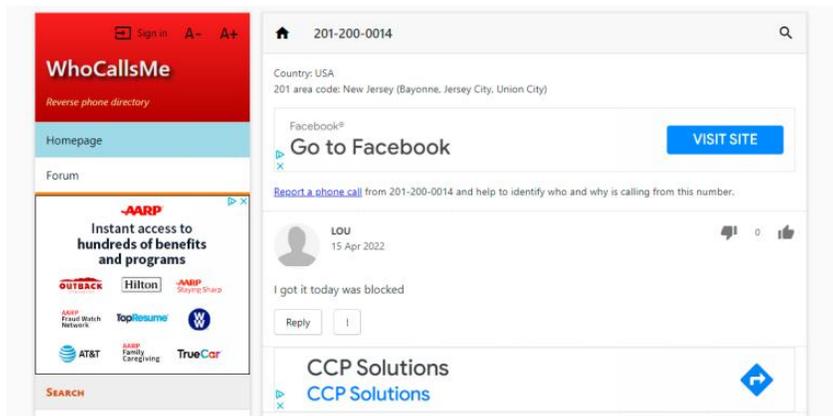
If you want to quickly know whether a caller is legit or a scammer, do a quick web search. As an example, I received a call from a number I didn't recognize. Instead of calling back, I searched for it online and found that the number was connected to my college's call center.

Another phone number did not show any reliable results, suggesting it may be a scammer or robocaller. As a rule of thumb, if the search results are primarily reverse phone lookup websites, it's safe to say other people have received unwarranted calls from that same number and are reporting it to warn others.

Do a Reverse Phone Lookup

Speaking of reverse phone lookups, if you really want to do some digging about a certain phone number, there are many websites that can help you out. You usually have to pay to get any worthwhile information, but there are a few tools that can help you for free.

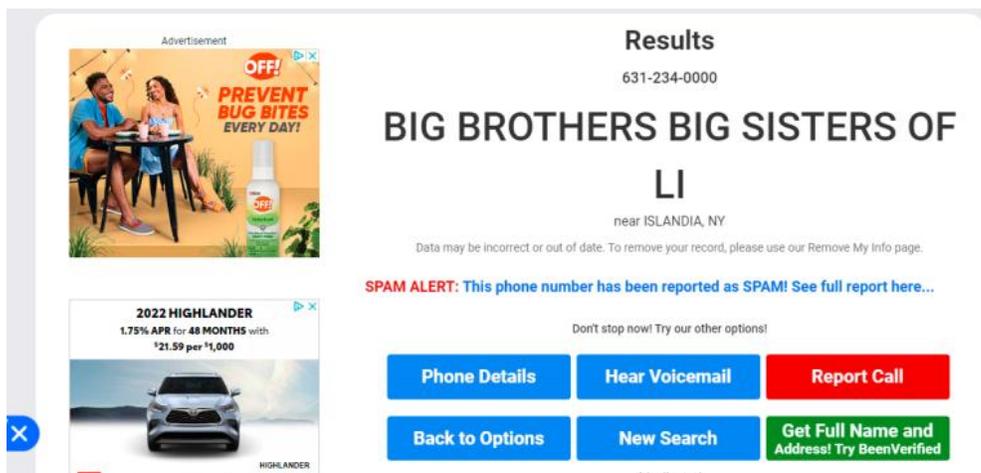
WhoCallsMe



(Credit: WhoCallsMe)

At [WhoCallsMe](#), users can report their experiences with specific phone numbers. Enter a number and the website will tell you where the area code is from. You can then enter your own report or view what others have to say about it.

Spy Dialer



(Credit: Spy Dialer)

[Spy Dialer](#) allows you to search for phone numbers, names, addresses, and emails. Enter a phone number, then choose if you want to look up any linked names or photos, listen to the number's outbound

voicemail, or confirm if the number is spam or not. Spy Dialer can tell you with whom the number is registered, their general location, and whether or not the number has been reported as spam before. For more information, click **Phone Details** to see how long the line has been in service and if the number is spoofed. Choose **Hear Voicemail** to get the caller's outbound voicemail, if available. You can click **Report Call** to file a complaint with Spy Dialer.

PeopleFinders

Success! Get results for (301) 324-9500

Frederick
View larger map

Owner's Full Name
✓ See Owner's Name

Current Address
✓ See Full Address

Phone Type:
LandLine/Services

Carrier:
Verizon Maryland Inc

Address:
Frederick, MD

Reverse Phone Reports May Include:
✓ Owner name + current address
✓ Found 4 possible addresses
✓ Found 38 possible relatives

Unlock Phone Report

Reverse Phone Reports May Include:

- ✓ Current and Past Contact Info
- ✓ Reverse Phone Lookups
- ✓ Addresses and Phone Numbers
- ✓ AKAs, Age / Birth Month & Year
- ✓ Relatives and Associates

Special Offer with PeopleFinders Trial Membership*

- ✓ Includes full access to Phone Searches
- ✓ Includes full access to People Searches

BEST DEAL

Special Offer
\$0.95

Continue

(Credit: PeopleFinders)

[PeopleFinders](#) allows you to look up a phone number, name, address, or email. Enter a phone number into the search bar to get the caller's general location, carrier, and phone type. More revealing information, such as the caller's full name and address, are hidden behind a paywall.

USPhoneBook

USPhoneBook

Enter Name

Phone Search Address Search Directory

Jason Cohen, Age 34

Search Background Report
Sponsored

Get notified of updates →

Current Address:

Phone Number:
- LandLine

Prior Addresses:

HANG IN THERE
you'll have crispy bacon soon
GET BACON

Keep it nscar

(Credit: USPhoneBook)

You can look up phone numbers, names, and addresses at [USPhoneBook](#), though this works better for identifying individuals rather than businesses. Enter a number to find the person connected to it. The site will display a list of people who may be related to the person. You can then mark the number as safe or spam. Keep in mind that these listings can be outdated.

Click **Get Details** to view extra information about the person. This will include their age, current (and former) addresses, any phone numbers associated with them, a list of relatives and associates, and even related email addresses.

What to Do Next



The banner features a green house icon with a telephone receiver on top, followed by the text "National Do Not Call Registry" in green. To the right is a grey button labeled "En Español". Below this are three icons: a computer monitor and two smartphones, a clipboard with a checkmark, and a smartphone with a telephone receiver. Each icon is above a colored button: "Report Unwanted Calls" (green), "Verify Your Registration" (blue), and "Register Your Phone" (orange). Below the buttons is the text: "The National Do Not Call Registry gives you a choice about whether to receive telemarketing calls". A bulleted list follows: "You can [register](#) your home or mobile phone for **free**."; "After you register, **other types of organizations may still call you**, such as charities, political groups, debt collectors and surveys. To learn more, read our [FAQs](#)."; "If you received an unwanted call after your number was on the National Registry for 31 days, [report it to the FTC](#)." At the bottom left, it says "Sellers and telemarketers: Go to <https://telemarketing.donotcall.gov> to access the National Do Not Call Registry."

(Credit: FTC)

Once you've looked up the number, now what? If it's a caller you don't want to hear from, you can [block spam callers](#). Keep in mind that, since most spammers use spoofed numbers that constantly change, this will only work if the same number keeps calling. iPhone users can send any callers who aren't in their contacts directly to voicemail, though this isn't always desired.

A better option is to look into your mobile carrier's anti-spam solutions for stopping [spam calls](#) and [robotexts](#). There are also apps like [RoboKiller](#) and [Truecaller](#) that can help keep the spam callers at bay. You can also report unwanted calls to the FTC and register your number with the [National Do Not Call Registry](#), though those wishing to do you harm will undoubtedly ignore this.