



A Buyer's Guide to Phone Append Services

WHITE PAPER

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Third Edition

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If you use a service provider to add and update phone numbers on your call list or for your outreach campaigns, you may be unknowingly allowing someone else to decide for you which phone numbers are the best for you or for your clients. You may receive a pre-appended file from your clients or you may send out your files for a phone append process in tandem with your Do-Not-Call scrubbing. A phone append process is any process that adds a phone number to another type of contact data, most typically a name and address. It may appear that “Phone Append” is a commodity, but there are actually many different types of phone append processes and quality grades. Being a savvy information service buyer can reduce your unreachables, increase your contactability ratio and improve your conversion rate.

In the following sections we’ll address six key questions you need to answer before you make your decision about the data you purchase.

Question 1: How Current Is the Data?

There are five common grades of phone append services that, among other factors, define the “freshness” of the phone numbers: Whitepage, Directory Assistance, Non-Telco Compiled, Utility Billing and Special Purpose. The grades are differentiated by a set of factors that include:

- **Freshness** of the phone numbers - how quickly updates from the phone companies are integrated into the data
- **Field Saturation** - how frequently each data field contains a value (especially the first name and street address fields which are often intermittent)
- **Geographic Coverage** – a measure of how many phone numbers a process has access to as a percentage of the total phone numbers available in a particular geographic area.
- **Type Coverage** – Does the service provide:
 - landline vs. cell phones
 - business vs. residential phones
 - published vs. non-published phones
- **Permissible Purpose** – for what purposes can the phone numbers be called? Common purposes include marketing, non-profit, survey, funds/donation solicitation, political, collections and employment verification. Another very important and related issue is whether or not the phone numbers are on one of the state or national Do-Not-Call (DNC) lists.

Whitepage phone appends use phone numbers drawn from electronic copies of phone books. These numbers were accurate and verified by the phone company but there’s no guarantee that the phone number is *still* active. Whitepage and DA/411 data can generally be used for marketing with the obvious limitations of the Do-Not-Call and other Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) regulations.

Directory Assistance (DA), also known as **411** data, can be thought of as “what the phone book looks like right now” data. DA data is typically updated every 24 to 48 hours so it is very current and contains newly connected phone numbers. It also contains some records which are not published in the phone book. One of the few downsides of Directory Assistance data are data gaps. Important pieces of information like apartment numbers, or in some cases even the entire address, may be missing if the consumer requested them to be excluded from the printed phone book.

	Freshness (in months)	Field Saturation	Geographic Coverage	Type Coverage*	Marketing Allowed?
Whitepage	1-12 months	medium	national	BRLP	Yes
Directory Assistance	daily	medium	national	BRLP	Yes
Non-Telco Compiled	unpredictable	high	spotty	RLWPN	Yes
Utility Billing	1 to 30 days	high	regional	BRLWPN	No
Special Purpose	varies	varies	varies	varies	No

* type coverage: B=Business, R=Residential, L=Landline
W=Wireless, P=Published, N=Non-Published

Table 1. Phone Append Data Grades and Factors

Non-Telco Compiled data is assembled from non-typical, generally non-utility sources of phone numbers. This data can be useful in filling in some gaps in telco originated datasets, but the freshness of this information is pretty unpredictable. These datasets are commonly “scraped” from other types of information such as warranty cards or ring-tone downloads. Since some of these data sources are “self-reported,” use this type of data carefully and don’t pay more than it’s worth.

Utility Billing files contain phone numbers from either a telephone company or other utility. These are normally good in quality and completeness but they generally only cover a particular region of the country or a known subset of all possible phone numbers. This information is both hard to find and of limited permissible purpose. Typically marketing use is not allowed, but there may be exceptions for particular call sponsors (political parties, non-profits, government, etc.) or for specific call purposes like non-solicitation surveys, political campaigns, medical or emergency notification, etc.

Special Purpose files are compilations of records with specifically allowed uses. They are often similar in restrictions to Utility Billing based information but they are primarily built from non-utility information. There is a wide variety of special purpose information on the market including those that provide some cell phone information and those built primarily from voter registration records which are generally limited for use in political campaigns only. Most of the phone numbers available from these special purpose files come with some kind of restriction. In fact, if someone tries to sell you a special purpose file that has no restrictions proceed with caution, especially if the file contains cell phones.

Question 2 – How Specific Are the Results?

The most commonly advertised measurement in any data-append process is the “match rate.” In the case of finding phone numbers for your file of names and addresses, the match rate is a measure of how many phone numbers your provider returns compared to the number of name and address records you sent them. When you compare match rates among phone append service providers it’s important to be aware of the variety of issues that can affect the match rate, including...

- The quality and completeness of the name and address you send your provider
- The breadth of data to which your provider has access
- How effective your provider is at finding the names and addresses it has on file
- How specific or general of a match you will accept

You alone control the first factor; the quality and completeness of the name and address data you send your provider. Just keep in mind the old adage: “Garbage in, garbage out.” If you are buying a list from a list broker or a lead generation company, make sure you’re getting good quality and consistent data formatting. Also, make sure your file’s contact records have the right data in the right fields. Buying a file with mailing addresses in the name field or vice-versa is a waste of money.

When shopping for phone appending services, ask your provider how many different sources they use and the approximate number of contact records to which they have access. In general, bigger is better, but the third factor, search effectiveness, is where the art of phone appending comes into play. Just having access to phone numbers doesn’t mean your provider is going to find them. Ask them how much “fuzziness” they allow in their data searches. Will they find the phone number for “**John McDonald, 123 Main St**” if your contact file uses this spelling: “**Jonathan MacDonald, 123 Maine Ave**”? If you only want exact, literal matches, make sure they know that. Verifying a sample of the phone numbers returned to you is always a good idea.

If you or your client only want to speak to a specific individual, tell your provider you don’t want “household” (same last name at the address but a different first name) or “address” (same address but a different name) level matches. Reputable data service companies only want you to have the data that best meets your needs. If a provider tries to sneak in address-only matches in order to improve their match rate and increase your charges you should look for a new provider. If they have your interests at heart they’ll appreciate your assistance in helping them meet your needs.

Question 3 – What Is the Purpose of Your Call?

All phone calls are not created equal. Making a call to tell a potential customer about a great new product is treated very different legally from a call made to notify a patient of an upcoming appointment. However, as general-use data resources get fewer and fewer (and hence become overused) new contact data resources are being developed that allow use for outbound calling only for specific purposes. For example, calls specific to a candidate’s campaign may be differentiated from those for a state-wide ballot measure; political survey use is now being differentiated from political funds solicitation use. Calls on behalf of one kind of non-profit may be differentiated for those on behalf of another non-profit of a different kind.

The common theme, then, for contact outsourcers is specificity. A contact outsourcer knows the particular type of message or call purpose but they may not be categorizing their customers in enough detail to obtain access to special use files only available for a specific purpose or other specific criteria.

A good example of this type of categorization that has been growing recently is that of membership. Are the individuals to whom a call is being made members of the calling organization? If so, is there any contact information available that is not available if the individuals are not members? This isn’t really a matter of whether or not a person is on the Do Not Call (DNC) list. All companies making outbound commercial calls need to pay very close attention to following the US Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC)

DNC regulations. Categorization of customers and call purpose is about having the widest variety of contacts with which to start. The wider the variety of contacts available to a call center, the better the opportunity to find someone to whom a call is allowed after all the necessary regulatory filtering has taken place.

Discuss with your phone append service provider or providers what options you may have for broadening your access to contact information and how you can properly communicate with your provider the categorization for the particular type of call you are making.

Question 4 – How Are You Initiating the Call?

A lot of changes have come down from the FTC regarding the techniques used to make a call. One of the most contentious and often misunderstood of these rules is about using auto-dialers.

Who can or can't be called using an auto-dialer has changed quite a bit. Prior to October 16, 2013, the most significant moratorium on auto-dialing related to calling wireless or cell phones. The driver for this was the potential that a consumer could be charged for a call they did not want to receive because in the US the called party pays the bill. But in October of 2013, the auto-dialer regulations were expanded to include any residential landline number.

Although the TCPA regulations from the FTC are primarily focused on commercial callers, at the current time about the only calls an auto-dialer can make are to those who have previously provided specific consent to being called by an auto-dialer.

Because of this, it's quite important that your phone append provider knows how you're dialing the numbers they provide. The numbers that are available to you if you are manually dialing are different than those that might be appropriate for you if you are using an auto-dialer. It's a pretty big waste of money to pay for phone numbers that, given the way you initiate the call, might not be usable. We're seeing a trend among outbound callers to move away from auto-dialers because doing so greatly restricts the number of phone numbers that can even be called.

Question 5 – Is Your Data Going To Be Kept?

There are many reasons to sign a contract for phone append services. Most reputable providers will ask for a contract, but even if they don't request one, you should. Only with a contract can you control what happens to your data when you send it off to your provider. We think the most important clause in your contract isn't the price but the ***Allowed Usage*** clause.

When you send your phone append service provider a file of names and addresses you might have assumed that they would use that information only to append phone numbers for you. After all, that's what their business is, right? But if you don't have a contract that limits allowed uses by your service provider, they may keep the data, or even resell the information. Your private list of contacts and customers could be sold on the open market to anyone with the money to buy the data and the only way to prevent that from happening is with a contract that specifically states it won't. Without an allowed usage clause, you have no say over whether or not your provider keeps the data. If your

provider doesn't want to add that to your contract or wants to do the phone append processing without a contract, find someone else.

One quick and helpful way to find service providers who won't do this is to look for those that are certified under the US Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Privacy Shield program. This certification essentially gives the FTC the right to prosecute the company if they don't follow the more stringent European privacy rules. The Privacy Shield certification isn't the only indicator of the way a company handles privacy, but it is something important to consider even for companies that are located in the US. For a list of companies that are certified under the Privacy Shield program, go to the FTC's website at <https://www.privacyshield.gov>.

Question 6 – Is Your Phone Append Provider Trying to Hide?

We've saved this question for last because if you remember nothing else from this paper, remember this: make sure you know who is running your phone append service provider and where they are. We see many websites offering phone append services but they list no street address, no names for any of their management team and sometimes they don't even publicize a phone number. We strongly encourage you to check out their website and look for any sign of a human's name, a business address or a phone number. Sending your company or organization's contact data to a website that isn't transparent about whom and where they are isn't wise.