(Approx. 709 words)

Google Voice and Its Many Uses

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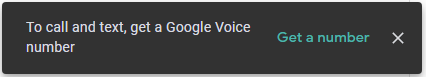
I recently had a use for an additional phone number. Google Voice to the rescue! It's free (for calls within the U.S.), works nicely, and is easy to use. Here is what I learned in the process.  
  
**What is Google Voice?** Google Voice is a software tool that allows you to obtain a free phone number. It can't be your only phone number and you need a Google account. You can set up a Gmail account for free if you don't already have one. It doesn't require any hardware or physical phone (other than what you already own).  
  
**Why would you want an additional phone number?** Here are a few reasons:

* You temporarily want a phone number that you can delete later.
* You want a phone number for a different U.S. city.
* You have a side gig, perhaps selling hand-crafted items, and don't want to use your own phone number for that business.
* You want a phone number for specific people to use, such as family members.

I recently read of two teachers in Maryland who set up a Google Voice phone number for seniors to call if they needed help setting up a Covid vaccination appointment. The possibilities are endless.  
  
**How do I sign up?** To get started, [go here](https://voice.google.com/) and sign into your Google account. If you are already logged in, click on the grid of nine dots for Google apps at the upper right of the screen. Scroll to the very bottom and click "More from Google". Then scroll down until you see the Google Voice icon and click on it. Here are the icons to click on.

You now see the "dashboard" for your voice account, even though you don't yet have a number. To get your number, click the box at the bottom that prompts you to get a Google Voice number.



Type in the location where you want the phone number to be based, then choose your new number from a list of available ones. It can be either in your local area or elsewhere in the United States.  
  
**How does it work?** Calls to your new number will forward to a number you specify. It might be your cell phone or landline. The number it forwards calls to is your linked number, and you can set up more than one number to ring at the same time. You can also edit the name for the number that will appear on the recipient's caller ID.  
  
One of the settings lets you see the number that the person dialed, as opposed to the number of the phone it is linked to. That lets you know that they are calling the Google Voice number. Adding that number with an identifying label to your Contact list shows you immediately the number the caller dialed. This allows you to answer the phone with a different greeting if you want.  
  
You can also create a personalized message that people hear when they leave a voice mail. The default message, designed to eliminate spam and automated calls, asks the caller to speak their name so you get to decide whether or not you want to take the call.

When someone leaves a message at the new number, you can listen to it in your account dashboard, where a text version is also stored. You will also receive an email at your Gmail account when someone leaves a message.  
  
There are dozens of settings you can adjust in the app or your computer dashboard. For example, you can limit the hours that phone calls to the number will ring (a "Do Not Disturb" setting). You can set up more than one phone to ring at the same time if you want. Be sure to have the other phone handy so you can enter the verification code that Voice will send you before it links the device to the number.  
  
This is the article that convinced me to give Google Voice a try:  
[www.businessinsider.com/what-is-google-voice-how-to-set-up-use](https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-google-voice-how-to-set-up-use)  
  
For complete instructions on setting up Google Voice, [go here](https://support.google.com/voice/answer/115061?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&oco=0).  
  
All in all, it's a very powerful tool and may be just what you need.