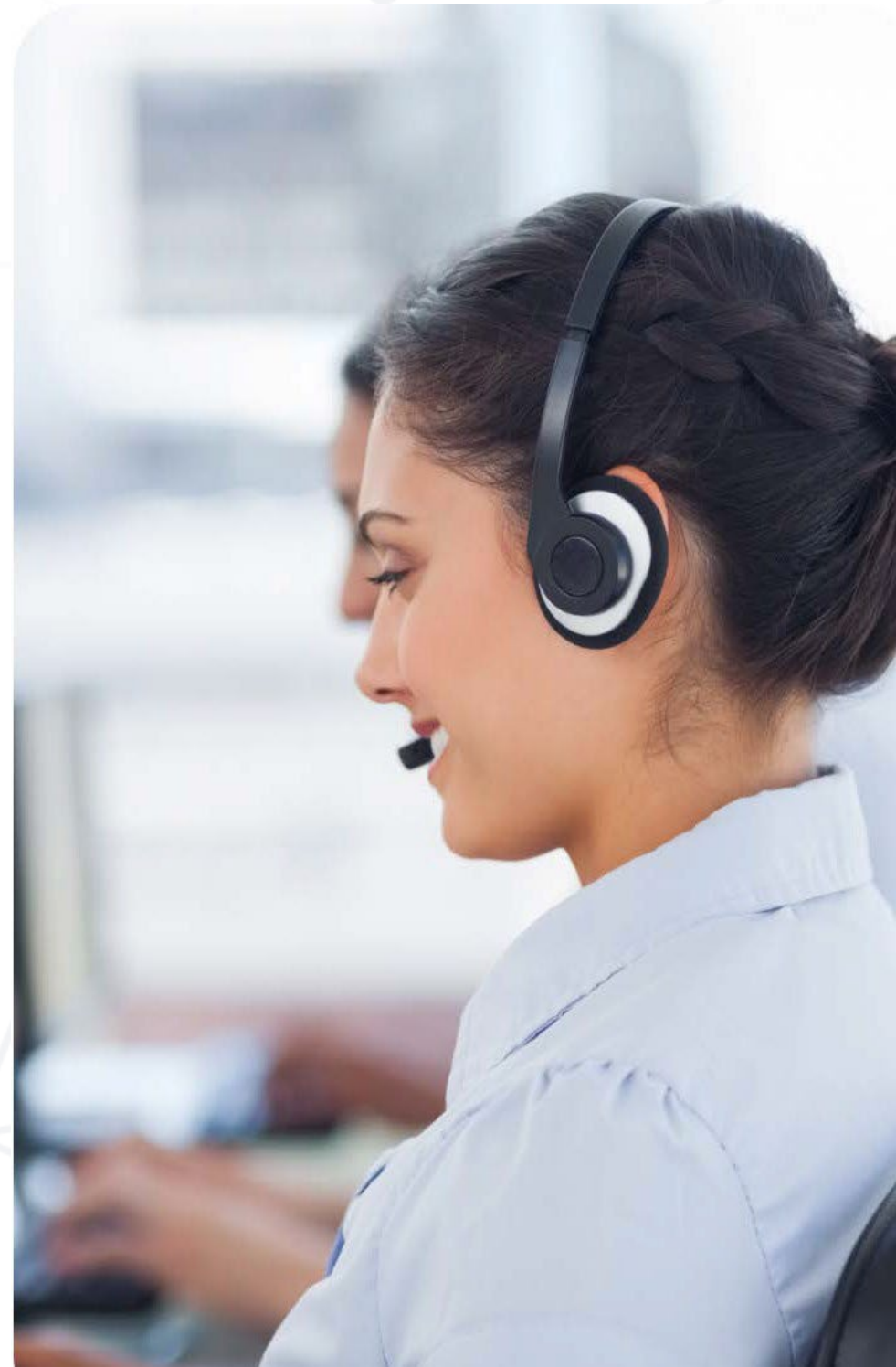


CONNECTING THE LAST MILE

Heath Wilson | Last Updated 7/03/2023

Through my research for this article, I have gained an appreciation for the remarkable technological advancements that have made the entire process of ordering products online, such as furniture, seamless until they arrive at my doorstep. It's incredible to see how sophisticated the process is and how impressive the technology involved is, including route optimization software, order tracking, and customer experience features. Seeing all these aspects come together, from the retailer to the delivery truck that pulls up in front of my home, is truly fascinating. As consumers, we often overlook the complexity of the last-mile delivery process, but it's clear that it's been revolutionized by cutting-edge technology.



If we as customers had a better understanding of the intricate details of last-mile delivery, we would be more understanding when things don't go as planned. It's great to see that retailers and last-mile delivery companies are investing in technology to help provide even more positive customer experiences. I have personally experienced the benefits of order tracking and text message updates, which have been fantastic. However, in doing my research I noticed one thing missing when it comes to the customer experience: almost all the emphasis was placed on digital communication. While digital communication offers speed and cost-efficiency, phone calls remain crucial for enhancing the customer experience. Therefore, businesses must stay updated with advancements and changes in the area of tele-communications to effectively engage with their customers.

DO YOU SCREEN YOUR CALLS?

It's crucial to acknowledge the significant changes in consumer behavior in recent years. Americans are addicted to their cell phones, social media, texting, games, and surfing the Internet. The average person is spending 3-4 hours a day on their cell phone. So, why don't people answer phone calls? The answer lies in the explosion of robocalls and scam calls.

Recent studies show 87% of people don't answer calls from unknown numbers and less than 6% pick up when a call is labeled as Scam/Spam.



In 2022, Americans were swindled out of approximately \$87 billion by robocalls and phone scams, marking a staggering 116% increase from the previous year.

In 2021, a single scam group in India made an astonishing 200 million scam calls, averaging over 27,000 scam attempts per hour.

It's no wonder we are screening our calls. We get tired of hanging up on the car warranty guy for the 15th time.

The FCC has jumped in to make combatting unlawful robocalls and malicious caller ID spoofing a top consumer protection priority by implementing rules like Caller ID Authentication (STIR/SHAKEN) and major fines for bad actors.

Cellular carriers are also taking steps to safeguard consumers by implementing call labeling algorithms. This will enable phone numbers with suspicious behavior to be identified and labeled accordingly, giving consumers more information before they answer a call. These measures are essential in the fight against illegitimate robocalls and scammers.

While this author agrees that these measures are necessary and are having a positive impact on protecting consumers, it's also true that legitimate businesses are facing serious challenges in connecting with their customers due to the implementation of call labeling algorithms. It's crucial to strike a balance between protecting consumers and ensuring that businesses can reach their customers.

With that said, let's take a deeper dive into STIR/SHAKEN, call labeling algorithms, and what businesses can do to protect their brand and engage their customers.

STIR/SHAKEN

It's not a James Bond Martini order... if you're not "tech minded" you may want one after reading this.

The FCC implemented STIR/SHAKEN in 2021.



STIR/SHAKEN uses digital certificates, based on common public key cryptography techniques, to ensure the calling number of a telephone call is secure. In simple terms, each telephone service provider obtains their digital certificate from a certificate authority that is trusted by other telephone service providers. The certificate technology enables the called party to verify that the calling number is accurate and has not been spoofed.

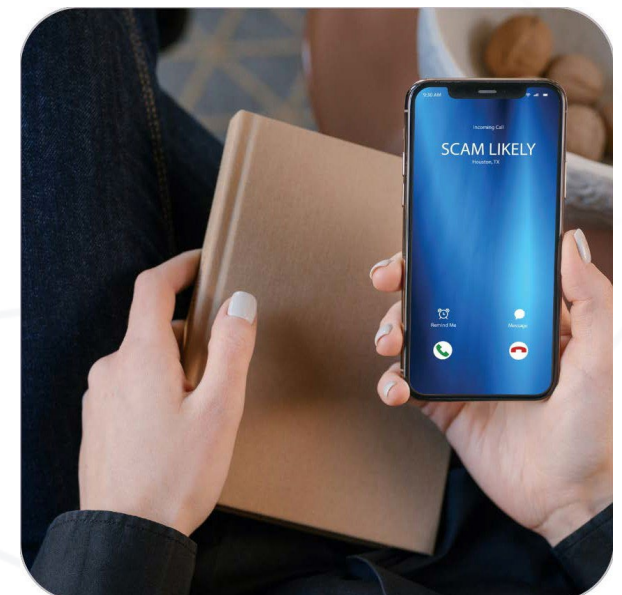
Here is why this is important for your business: The originating telephone service provider checks the call source and calling number to determine how to “Attest” for the validity of the calling number and gives it a rating of A, B, or C.

An attestation rating of C means that the telecom carrier does not know the caller's identity, and some carriers have a policy to block all calls that are transmitted with a C attestation, which means if you have a C attestation your calls are probably not getting through. They don't tell you; they just don't put them through.

It's important your business takes responsibility for checking your attestation rating, rather than solely relying on your phone provider to do so. While STIR/SHAKEN is a positive development for consumer protection, it's worth noting that there are still some issues that need to be addressed. However, by following best practices and ensuring compliance, your business can avoid potential issues with attestation ratings.

CALL LABELING

Call labeling is designed to inform customers about the calls they are receiving so they can decide whether to answer. Carriers break labels into two categories: warning and intent.



Warning labels, such as potential spam, spam risk, scam likely, fraud risk, and others, are meant to alert users of potential dangers. On the other hand, intent labels, which include charity/non-profit, informational, political, survey, and others, are used to indicate the purpose of the call.

Unfortunately, carriers often incorrectly apply negative labels to legitimate calls, which can be frustrating for both businesses and customers. It's important to be aware of the potential for mislabeling and take steps to prevent it from happening. By doing so you can ensure that your calls are labeled accurately and avoid any misunderstandings with customers.

Carriers employ complex algorithms for labeling calls, and they don't openly share this information for obvious reasons. However, over time, we have discovered certain behaviors the carriers analyze to determine whether a call should be flagged. Here are a couple of examples:

CALL VOLUME

One data point carriers look at is call volume. For example, if you place over 100 calls that originate from the same phone number in the same day, it's likely you'll get flagged because it could be viewed as suspicious.

AUDIO FINGERPRINTING

Another example is Audio Fingerprinting, which uses algorithms to analyze sound files and create digital summaries of their content. This technology recognizes calls that use the same recorded messages to reach consumers. When it detects the same message from different numbers, it suspects those numbers are making scam calls and will apply a negative label.



It's important to follow best practices when it comes to making phone calls to avoid being flagged as a potential scam caller. With that said, because the algorithms are unpredictable, even if you do everything right, you can still get flagged. At 448 Connect, we follow best practices and monitor all our phone numbers, and even our President's cell phone was flagged recently. We've also seen numbers with very low call volumes get flagged regularly. It's just a reminder that businesses must be proactive and vigilant.

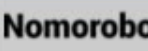
So, what can you do to protect your business and your customers?

CHECK YOUR ATTESTATION RATING

To check your attestation rating, call an attestation phone number checker who will provide this information (448 Connect can provide you a phone number). The process may be a bit time-consuming, but it's worth it to ensure that your calls are authenticated and that your customers aren't seeing spam/scam when you call them. Remember to also check with your phone provider to ensure that they have implemented STIR/SHAKEN.

MONITOR YOUR PHONE NUMBERS

To ensure your phone numbers are not flagged, you should subscribe to a service that monitors your phone numbers across different carriers. This will help you stay informed and alert you when a phone number is flagged. Unfortunately, carriers do not make a database of "flagged" numbers available. The only way to check if your phone number is flagged is by calling a phone on that network to see how it displays. To do this efficiently, a device cloud is used, which are large arrays of cell phones where screenshots are taken of the display. This data is then used to notify customers when a negative label is identified, making it a unique and effective solution to this problem.

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<input type="checkbox"/>	281-555-1232				✓	✓	07/02/2023 21:05
<input type="checkbox"/>	281-555-1233	✓				✓	07/02/2023 21:06
<input type="checkbox"/>	281-555-1234	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	07/02/2023 21:06
<input type="checkbox"/>	281-555-1235	✓		✓	✓	✓	07/02/2023 21:06

BRANDED CALLING

It's worth considering utilizing a newer technology called Branded Calling. Although caller ID has been around for ages, this "new" caller ID is designed specifically for cell phones and has a maximum character limit of 32, making it more reliable and allowing room for creativity, such as including the reason for the call. This technology also shows the brand in the call log, which is a plus. It's important to note that the old landline caller ID (CNAM) doesn't work on cell phones unless you, as the consumer, have downloaded and installed a caller ID app, which less than 10% of consumers do. Branded Calling is a great solution and can help your business stand out while ensuring the authenticity and safety of your phone calls.

In late 2021, one of our technology partners First Orion surveyed 5,000 U.S. mobile phone subscribers about their experiences with calls from retail businesses to their mobile phones. People were asked about call activity, type, brands they interact with, their perceptions of those brands based on calling behavior, and their preferences in relation to those experiences.

Over

1/2

of people prefer a phone call for urgent issues related to an order from a brand/store

Approximately

43%

prefer speaking with a live person over the phone when trying to resolve a shopping issue remotely

A Significant Majority

64%

of customers are willing to switch to a different brand for one that could properly identify itself on a phone call





Help! I Need Somebody...

But not just anybody. People want to talk to a living, breathing person who can assist.

After the purchase, customers want phone calls more than email/mobile app messaging or text/SMS for most customer service scenarios.

For **non-urgent**, customer service-related issues:

- Phone call – 43%
- Email or mobile app message – 35%
- Text/SMS – 22%

The gap gets even wider for **urgent issues** (late/missing deliveries, incorrect items, driver needs directions, etc.):

- Phone call – 55% (up from 30% in 2020)
- Text/SMS – 30% (27% in 2020)
- Email or mobile app message – 15% (down from 32% in 2020)

Email and text are indeed efficient communication methods, but sometimes customers need to speak to a real person. They want to hear from you if there's an update on their delivery or if there's a problem. That's why it's important to consider using technologies like phone number monitoring and branded calling to make the last mile of the phone call experience the best it can be for your customers while at the same time giving your business the best chance of connecting with the customers while protecting your brand at the same time.

Heath Wilson is the VP of Sales and Marketing at 448 Connect

448 Connect provides Caller ID Protection and Call Branding Solutions to a variety of businesses including non-profits and blood centers.

Connect with us today to learn more about how to protect your phone numbers and business reputation.

www.448connect.com

connect@team448.com

(877) 394-0017

