

# 'Thought it was a scam': Small addition a big change for Brisbane phone numbers

ABC Radio Brisbane

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If you receive a phone call from Brisbane that starts with a 2, don't worry — it's just growing pains. (*ABC News: Nic MacBean*)

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Growing cities put a squeeze on infrastructure that is obvious in traffic jams, soaring skylines and shrinking backyards — but there is another, less visible pressure point: phone numbers.

Brisbane is running out of landline numbers that start with the digit 3.

Communications Alliance chief executive officer John Stanton told ABC Radio Brisbane the fix for the number crunch was simple — add a new digit.

That's what the Australian Communications and Media Authority did in 2014 — in this case, a 2 — and numbers that reflect that change are now becoming more common.

But it might be surprising to have one of these new numbers pop up on a phone screen, with the geographical information insisting it's coming from inside Brisbane.

That's what happened to Josh, who thought "it was a scam".

"So, I didn't answer the phone, did a bit of a Google search of the number and it was actually a clothing store that I had ordered clothes from," he said.

## **A brief history of phone numbers**



The first female telephonists in Brisbane commenced work in June 1899. *(Supplied: State Library of Queensland)*

Communications Alliance Numbering Working Group chair Alexander Osborne says the trick of adding new numbers, and letters, to accommodate more customers is an old one.

He started working in directory services in 1973, when telcos were shifting from alphanumeric phone numbers to an eight-digit numbering system, including the state area code.

"For example, your number might start with AE and then a four-digit number and then it was changed to all numbers," he said.

"And then, in 1994, we started to change to eight-digit numbers, ten if you include the area code.

"I still remember my mother's number in Sydney was 536 952, where she lived, we added 91 to the beginning, in different places around Sydney there would have been different numbers."

In contrast, the first phone numbers in Brisbane were simple: 1-36. It was the exact number of telephones.

The Brisbane Courier explained the modern marvel of the telephone exchange in an article from October 1880 — the year it launched.

"Into this room all the telephone wires from east, west, north, and south are conducted and placed in connection with a beautifully ingenious apparatus technically known as a 'switch board,'" the journalist enthused.

## Landline use declining



Landline use has halved since 2015.(*Gemma Howell: ABC News*)

That was more than 140 years ago, and Mr Stanton said landline use is down by about 50 per cent since 2015 and about 60 per cent of Australians only use mobiles for voice calls.

So, how is it possible to run out of numbers?

"The actual number of landlines is dropping much more slowly, by about 1 per cent a year," Mr Stanton said.

"And I think what you're seeing is, for example, there are many people who've got an NBN connection that has a landline associated with it, but they never use it because they're mobile only.

"But nonetheless, the number is still caught up with that because of services sitting there basically doing nothing.

## **Where is that phone call from?**

Mr Stanton said being assigned a new era landline number was "a bit of a lottery".

## **Who gets a 2**

- (07) 20 Redcliffe and Samford
- (07) 21 Brisbane
- (07) 22 Bribie Island, Brisbane, Dayboro
- (07) 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29 Bribie Island, Brisbane, Dayboro, Esk
- (07) 28 Beenleigh, Cleveland, Ipswich

"It depends where you are, if you were in a in a growth area ... like Ipswich, you're probably more likely to end up with a number that starts with two," he said.

"It will also depend on your service provider, and how many numbers they happen to have still available and whether they've run out of their numbers starting with three."

Source: ['Thought it was a scam': Small addition a big change for Brisbane phone numbers - ABC News](#)