FACT sheet

Phonewords

This fact sheet describes what phonewords are, how they work and their use in Australia. The aim of this fact sheet is to provide you with information to ensure you are able to make best use of services accessed by dialling phonewords.

What are phonewords?

Phonewords are made up from the letters of the alphabet that appear on a telephone keypad. These letters can be used to form a word, or a part word/part number combination, which can then be dialled as a telephone number to access a particular service. One example is '1300 FLIGHT'. Every phoneword has a primary underlying phone number, or in some cases more than one number, used by the telecommunications network as an 'address' for delivering the call.

The types of numbers that are most commonly used for phonewords include those beginning with the prefixes '1300', and '1800', which are 10 digits in length, and numbers beginning with '13', which are generally six digits in length.

How can I obtain a phoneword?

Businesses and individuals may purchase the rights of use to any freephone (1800) or local rate (13 or 1300) number through ACMA's **smart**numbers® system. This is an online auction system which enables efficient and equitable access to available freephone and local rate numbers. For more information visit www.smartnumbers.com.au.

How do phonewords operate on different telephone keypads?

There are several telephone keypad types used in Australia and the three most common are set out below. The introduction of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Standard (see the first keypad in the figure below) in 1996 did not have retrospective effect. In addition to the ITU Standard keypad, there are two other alphanumeric keypads for fixed telephones and three for mobile phones. There are also telephones in use that have no letters. Unfortunately, the alphanumeric keypads do not have exactly the same combination of numbers and letters.

What this variety of keypads means is different keypad configurations may translate into different combinations of numbers

In November 2003, the then Australian Communications Authority (ACA) commissioned Newspoll to conduct a survey into the following:

- the penetration of alphanumeric telephone keypads, both fixed (home or office phone) and mobile, within Australia; and

- the occurrence of various types of keypads being used in Australia, for both fixed and mobile phones.

The research found that 96 per cent of fixed telephones in Australia have a keypad and 88 per cent have an alphanumeric keypad. Of the phones that have an alphanumeric keypad, the research found that 72 per cent have the ACA/International keypad. The percentage of mobile phones with the ACA/International keypad was found to be 93 per cent.

While this research shows that the majority of phones in Australia use the ITU Standard keypad, ACMA recommends that the underlying phone number is also advertised by phoneword owners to assist consumers to dial the number without confusion.

How does someone dial a phoneword if they don't have alphabetical characters on their telephone keypad?

If you don't have alphabetical characters on your keypad, all you have to do is dial the primary telephone number. This should appear along with the phoneword in advertising material. This primary number comes from the Australian and International Standard, as illustrated in the figure below.

What is 'overdialling' and why can it be a problem?

'Overdialling' refers to the situation where a person dials a phoneword that is longer than the standard length of the number underlying it. For example, if '1300 COMPUTER' is promoted as a phoneword, this has a 10-digit underlying primary number (in this case 1300 266 788), and overdialling will occur when the entire phoneword is called (1300 266 788 **37**).

When such a call is made from a GSM mobile phone, excess digits are ignored and the caller will be connected to the correct destination. At least three extra digits can be dialled for '1300' and '1800' numbers, and one extra digit for '13' numbers.

For calls made from fixed line telephones, the call connects after the tenth digit for '1300' and '1800' numbers, and after the sixth digit for '13' numbers. This means that the call may be answered before the caller finishes dialling the phone word, which could be confusing for the person making the call.

Consumers may also experience difficulties when dialling overdial numbers from, for example, PABX machines or ISDN connections.

What are the different keypads found in Australia?

The different keypad layouts commonly used in Australia are illustrated in Table 1.

More information

For more information about phone words, contact ACMA's Telecommunications Licensing, Numbering and Subcables Section on 03 9963 6800 or by email to numbering@acma.gov.au.

Table 1: Different keypad layouts commonly used in Australia

1	2 ABC	3 DEF
4 GHI	5 JKL	6 MNO
7 PQRS	8 TUV	9 WXYZ
*	0	#

AUSTEL/ACA/ACMA (and International Standard)

1 QZ	2 ABC	3 DEF
4 GHI	5 JKL	6 MNO
7 PRS	8 TUV	9 WXY
*	0	#

Former AUSTEL Standard

1	2 ABC	3 DEF
4 GHI	5 JKL	6 MNO
7 PRS	8 TUV	9 WXY
*	0	#

North American Standard

Please note: this document is intended as a guide only and should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.