# Maintaining Privacy When You Work From Home

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One of the issues I’ve had working as a freelance writer is wondering who I should give my home or cell numbers to. This is a particular issue when handing out business cards. I want to promote myself and get work, yet I don’t want just anyone calling my house and especially not my cell. Similarly, I don’t always want my home address passed around.

Obviously if you know somebody is legitimate and you don’t mind them calling you, fine. But let’s say you meet somebody at a party and they say they might have some work for you. So you want to give them contact information. But if they are just trying to get your number, they aren’t legitimate, or they are actually just going to try and sell you something, you might not want them to have your number or give it to others.

One solution to this I used for a while was to keep a second cell phone with pre-paid service on it (so it didn’t cost much). That way I knew people calling on it were mainly unknown business prospects and I’d let my voice mail get it. And that’s always an option, especially if you decide you’d like a second line just for business. You can see when somebody’s calling, whether you answer or not, or you can simply keep it off or on silent and check your voicemail daily.

Another solution is to use online voice mail. I use Private Phone by Net Zero because it’s free, but there are others out there. It is a free service where you are assigned a phone number and basically use it as voice mail. This allows you to give your number to anyone you want without fear of them finding your address through reverse lookup or getting unwanted calls at home or on your cell. The caller will get either a voice message by you (or you can use a generic system message) and leave voice mail.

You can check your messages either by phone or online. You can also set it up to alert you by e-mail or cell phone when you get a message. It’s also handy for giving to people you think might be telemarketers or when you’re dating.

You can pick almost any area code, so if you do a lot of business for a particular company out of town, you can get a number with that area code so that your client doesn’t have to pay to call you. It might also be useful for out-of-town friends and family. Some services also offer toll free numbers and the ability to forward calls to real phones (although you’ll probably pay for those services, so shop around).

As for your home address, I recommend getting a post office box. They aren’t that expensive and come in a variety of sizes. Some pack-and-ship stores offer not only boxes but pick-up service if you get a package delivery (since most places won’t deliver to a P.O. box). Sometimes you can even get a street address so it doesn’t appear that you’re using a box. Just make sure you use a reliable business that will stick around and has hours that are convenient for you.

If you print up your business cards, web site or other promotional material using your private number and post office box, you know you’ll be maintaining some amount of privacy while still allowing people to contact you.