

Understanding Call Blocking & Labeling

Protect Business Phone Numbers from Negative Call Reputation



About this Whitepaper

Have you ever received an incoming call labeled as 'Spam' or 'Scam?' Do you know if your business calls are being displayed as 'Spam' or 'Scam' to your customers? This white paper helps to build awareness and identify the solutions for this growing problem.

Many factors may cause negative reputation on your phone numbers that result in your calls being mislabeled with warning tags like Spam, Scam, Scam Likely, or even Fraud. This impacts your ability to successfully connect with customers and tarnishes your brand reputation.

Negative reputation starts calls off on the wrong foot. By removing the roadblocks of improper blocking and labeling, business across all industries (healthcare, financial, automotive, retail, safety) can maintain their relationship with their customers and avoid 'the missed call.'

This white paper seeks to provide insight into call labeling's continued impact to call delivery and suggest strategies to prevent the improper blocking and labeling of legitimate business calls before customer communications are impacted.

3

State of the Industry

Call Blocking & Labeling
Robocall Mitigation History

4

STIR/SHAKEN: Is It Related?

Call Blocking & Labeling
Robocall Mitigation History

5

The Scoring Behind the Label

How Risk Perception Drives Call Labeling Presentation

6

Industry Impact & Insights

Assessment of Improper Call Labeling Risks Across Industries

7

Recommendations

Best Practices to Promote Healthy Phone Number Usage

8

Action

More about TouchTone's Call Blocking and Labeling Solutions

State of the Industry

Call blocking and labeling technologies were introduced in 2017 to address the problem of a growing number of illegal calls defrauding consumers. These technologies assign a reputation to calls, displaying labels such as 'Scam,' 'Fraud' or 'Spam' on an incoming call screen. Calls categorized as Scam or Fraud can also be blocked at the network level, based on this reputational scoring.



As illegal robocall traffic continued to grow despite call blocking and labeling technologies, increased legislative efforts such as the TRACED Act were signed into law. Implementation of the STIR/SHAKEN caller ID authentication framework across the carrier network was mandated by June 2020 as the result.

Now that STIR/SHAKEN is in its implementation phases, reasonable analytics are still utilized across the wireless carriers to guide decisions on call labeling. STIR/SHAKEN, in contrast, is utilized to verify the identity of the calling party and its authorization to deliver traffic across the phone numbers displayed. The purpose of STIR/SHAKEN is to reduce the number of illegally spoofed calls, but STIR/SHAKEN does not weigh in, in any way, on a call's reputation.

2017

Call blocking and labeling technologies are introduced to address the problem of illegal calls defrauding consumers. These technologies assign a reputation to calls, displaying labels such as **Spam**, **Scam**, or **Fraud** on incoming call screens.

2020

Illegal robocall traffic continues to grow and begins to mislabel legal communications. The FCC publishes the TRACED Act, requiring implementation of STIR/SHAKEN to verifying the identity of the caller.

2021

FCC mandates two deadlines to implement the STIR/SHAKEN caller ID authentication framework across the carrier network, tracking progress or intent to file in the Robocall Mitigation Database. The second deadline was a deadline to hereafter mark the beginning of widespread call blocking.

2022 - 2023

The FCC published a series of Notice for Proposed Rulemakings and Requests for Comments in the matter of solving illegal robocalls.

STIR/SHAKEN: Is It Related?

Call Authentication vs. Reputational Analytics

STIR/SHAKEN is a framework used to verify the authorized use of a phone number in conjunction with a brand's identity. The purpose is to provide a verified indicator (such as a green checkmark) to identify that an incoming call is from a business authorized to use that number, as opposed to a bad actor who is illegally spoofing a phone number they don't have authorization to use or display.

The term "attestation" in reference to STIR/SHAKEN refers to the level of certainty (defined in levels A, B, or C) the service provider has in regards to the ownership or authorized use of the number being displayed in conjunction with the business's identity.

While STIR/SHAKEN validates the call's origination from an authorized source, it does not weigh in on whether or not you may want to answer the call. That's where reputational analytics come back into play.

[A] Full Attestation

SOURCE OF CALL + RIGHT TO USE CALLER ID INFORMATION

✓ SOURCE / IDENTITY OF CALLER

✓ 1 - B O O - # N U M - B E R

[B] Partial Attestation

SOURCE OF CALL + DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE CALLER ID INFORMATION

✓ SOURCE / IDENTITY OF CALLER

✗ 1 - B O O - # N U M - B E R

[C] Gateway Attestation

DOES NOT KNOW SOURCE OF CALL + DOES NOT HAVE RIGHT TO USE CALLER ID INFORMATION

✗ SOURCE / IDENTITY OF CALLER

✗ 1 - B O O - # N U M - B E R

Reputational analytics utilize a separate technology than STIR/SHAKEN and display labels such as Scam or Spam as a call terminates on a called party's mobile device, whether it's been STIR/SHAKEN attested or not. Being STIR/SHAKEN compliant does not have any impact to calls labeled as Scam or Spam. To address this, the reputation of the calls must be addressed within the analytics layer.



Analytics: The Scoring Behind the Label

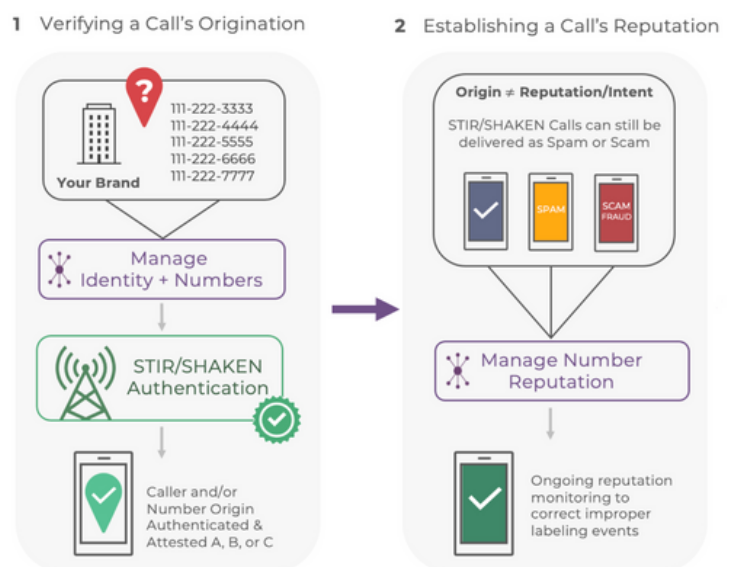
If you have ever received a call on your cell phone labeled 'Fraud,' 'Scam,' or 'Spam,'

you've experienced call labeling technologies in action. This scoring allows them to determine what to do in terms of call treatment (block, label, or redirect) when presented with robocalls that involve telephone numbers that have previously received algorithmic treatment.

The algorithms driving these reputational analytics will vary across mobile networks, but as a general rule of thumb, risk ratings, as described for the purposes of this white paper, can be defined as the raw perception data driving the presentation of the call labels themselves. A higher 'risk' rating drives more severe 'warning' language as presented to the consumer in the form of a call label. Risk ratings can also result in calls being blocked at the network level.

This is not the result of the STIR/SHAKEN framework, but rather the call's negative reputation - which will ultimately lead to getting blocked or being sent to voicemail. Call labeling and blocking is available for free across all of the major wireless carrier networks, so anyone you're calling on those networks could be at risk of seeing a negative label on your incoming call.

Call blocking or filtering apps, depending on consumer preference, can be configured to present a wide range of available data associated with a phone number including geographical information, suggested calling party name, etc. Apps represent a small percentage of the contact rate depreciation problem for businesses, thus, tackling this problem at the carrier level is the first recommended priority.



As reputational analytics remain in place as the primary determining factor to call presentation today, it's imperative to establish visibility into the reputation of your phone numbers and take steps to remove the roadblocks of improper call blocking and labeling in order to protect your brand identity and retain the trust of your consumers moving forward.

Industry Impact & Insights

Identifying Phone Numbers at Risk for Improper Call Blocking & Labeling

Call labeling technologies at the wireless carrier-level lead to calls being delivered as 'Spam' and 'Scam' - this causes lack of customer trust in your calls and damages brand reputation. Regardless of whether or not your carrier is STIR/SHAKEN compliant, your calls can still be blocked based on negative reputation.

Based on TouchTone's analysis of phone numbers in use across multiple calling industries, we've identified an average of **25%** of a business's phone numbers are typically at risk for improper call labeling. This percentage can increase depending on the intent of the call, frequency of outbound dialing attempts, etc.

25%

Of a business's phone numbers are typically at risk for being blocked or mislabeled, resulting in lost business, productivity, and customer satisfaction equal to a financial loss of millions.

Even though STIR/SHAKEN has been deployed, the reputational analytics will still remain. As such, the best first course of action for businesses conducting outbound calling is to identify yourself to the analytics ecosystem as a Verified business, and identify your phone numbers as associated with a legitimate business purpose. Through this process, you're able to remove the roadblocks of improper call blocking and labeling, protect your brand, correct 'Scam' or 'Spam' labeling, manage ongoing risk, and continue to reach your customers.

Reputation Remediation VS Monitoring

Ongoing **remediation** helps to maintain healthy number reputation, can increase contact rates, improve your overall call delivery and brand reputation, and provide the necessary insight to structure successful calling campaigns.

Reputation monitoring-only solutions give access to the status of your numbers' labeling, but do not provide a methodology to correct or remove the label.

TouchTone offers the only end-to-end identity management solution with the control and consistency needed to define how calls are displayed across the wireless calling ecosystem - including complete visibility into remediation status and history of numbers previously labeled Spam, Scam or Fraud.

Recommendations

Consider Call Volumes

As your business works to assess the impact of improper call labeling on your contact rates, you will need to understand the relationship between phone number risk and phone number usage. For example, if 99% of an organization's call traffic is delivered across one number, and you're dialing out on this phone number like crazy, auto-dialer or not, you're likely to experience some challenges with labeling. The algorithms are subjective, and 'aggressive-looking' dialing can be enough to trip the threshold.

Call Intent

Using one phone number to make a variety of different types of phone calls can come off as 'confusing' and 'inconsistent' to reputational analytics. It can also result in an increase in potential mislabeling associated with your phone numbers.

Think of this as a case of 'multiple personalities.' To the call labeling analytics community, if one number is originally recorded as calling about 'new account set-up for Company A' then tomorrow it's calling about 'customer service for Company B,' and the next day, 'past-due payments for Company C,' this perceived lack of clarity and consistency can seem suspicious and negatively affect a number's reputation.



Stay Consistent

It is important to stay consistent because reputational analytics can sometimes perceive abrupt changes to calling patterns, sudden spikes in traffic, and the frequent swapping of phone numbers as 'fraudulent-looking behaviors.'

Take Back Control

Don't let 'spam', 'scam' or fraud labels misrepresent you.

TouchTone offers a true number reputation management solution that is able to continuously prevent, improve, and correct negative call labels.

Learn more on how you can help protect your phone number reputation and establish trust in calling identity.

For additional information, email sales@touchtone.net.

TouchTone
communications