RealCall

2023 Scam Report

by RealCall

Background

Yes, it is our inherent responsibility to confront scammers. Now, we are using a report to bid farewell to 2023 and welcome 2024. In this report, we delve into people's daily habits that may finally lead to actual results—either making them scam-proof or more susceptible to scams.

Introduction

RealCall has released reports ranging from pig butchering scams to AI scams, as we deeply believe that knowing better leads to doing better. However, knowledge is never the sole target. When confronted with potential scam calls or texts disguised as normal ones, the study on behaviors plays a vital role in strengthening call and text security. It not only depends on what people know but also on how people act. Changing people's behavior is admittedly not easy, but if we want to make the digital world a safer place, it is essential to lead people to awareness of the connection between their behaviors or habits and their scam-proof or scam-prone life.

To prepare for this report, we interviewed 1,000 participants from the US (818 participants) and other countries (182 participants) of all ages from Gen Z to Silent Generations. We extracted all participants' behaviors and habits regarding their use of phones for calls and messages to draw a leading summary, determining what behaviors should be retained for a secure life and what should be abandoned.

A Statistical Snapshot of 2023

In 2023, Americans have received a staggering 52 billion spam and scam calls, indicating an average of around 4.33 billion unwanted calls each month (data up to December 5th, 2023), marking a significant 44% increase from the previous year.

Over 95 billion spam and scam texts flooded Americans' phones in 2023, reflecting an approximate 16% YoY increase.

RealCall's survey and metrics indicate that Americans suffered an estimated $66 billion in financial losses due to phone scams.

Scammers are evolving, and some scams are booming. AI impersonation scams are the hottest trend, growing rapidly and causing major financial damage. Fake customer support, student loan, and car warranty scams are also persistent threats. Be on the lookout!

Decoding Scams: Attitudes and Habits that Bite

1 There's a paradox; on one hand, staying secure on calls and messages is a big concern for most people, but on the other hand, they easily expose themselves to potential risks.

2 Despite a good number of participants having access to call and message security training, its effectiveness falls short of expectations. The elderly receive the least call and message security training but they are the most vulnerable.

3 Most scam (call/message) victims rarely report numbers, and a majority of them have no idea where or how to report.

4 Participants have a deep misunderstanding about scam call/message blocker tools, with most believing they're expensive and complicated to truly protect against scams.

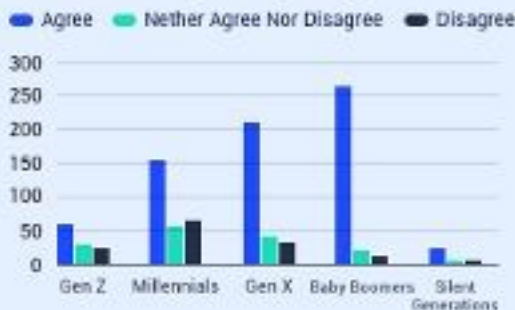# How many online accounts is your (private) phone number linked to?

When asked about their general attitudes towards staying secure from scam calls and messages, 81.3% of participants think it's a priority to stay secure from scam calls and messages and 71.4% of participants think it worth the effort. Nevertheless, 55.9% of participants think it's out of their control to make it. That's a paradox.

Participants' General Attitudes to Staying Secure from Scam Calls and Messages

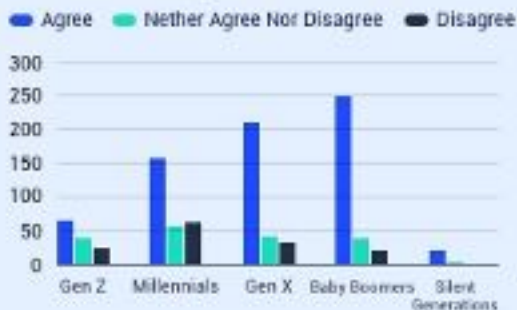● Agree ● Nether Agree Nor Disagree ● Disagree
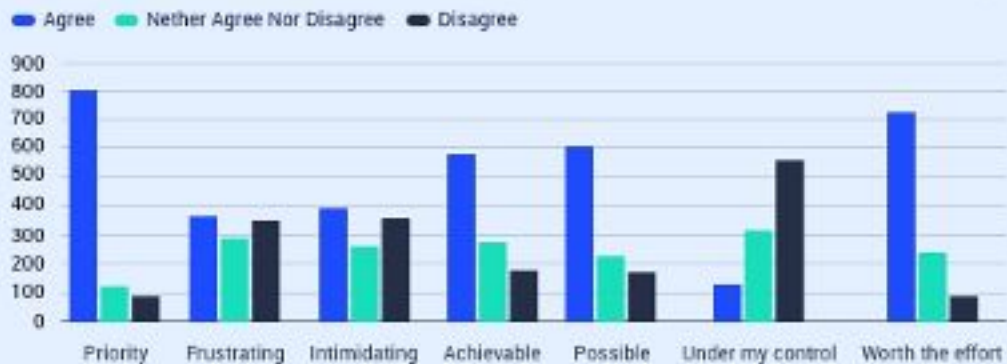
Moreover, among all the participants that believe staying secure from scam calls and messages is priority or worth the effort, a majority of each age group is for the statement.

"I feel that staying sescure from scam calls and mesages is priority"

● Agree ● Nether Agree Nor Disagree ● Disagree

"I feel that staying sescure from scam calls and mesages is worth the effort"

● Agree ● Nether Agree Nor Disagree ● Disagree

In addition, when asked "How many online accounts is your (private) phone number linked to", 22.7% of participants link their phone numbers to more than 20 online accounts and 22% of participants fail to clearly figure out the exact number. It indicates that a phone number can be easily provided when it's required by online platforms or services.

Number of Online Accounts Linked to Your Phone Number

| Category	Value
I only have one online account	31
2-4 online accounts	169
5-9 online accounts	200
10-19 online accounts	153
20 or more online accounts	227
Not sure, I lost count	220

On one hand, most participants think it important and necessary to stay secure from scam calls and messages. On the other hand, they tend to be pessimistic about the possibility of making it and their phone numbers are easily given when being required.

What is the main reason you didn't use the opportunity to attend a call and text security training?

When confronted with whether they have access to call and text security training, 63.2% of participants indicate "they have access to it and use it" and among them, more than half of them, 52.85%, are employed.

"Do you have access to call and text security training (e.g. at work, school, or library)?"
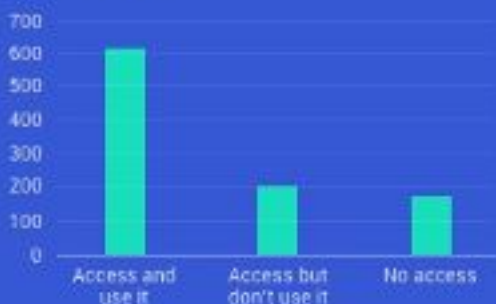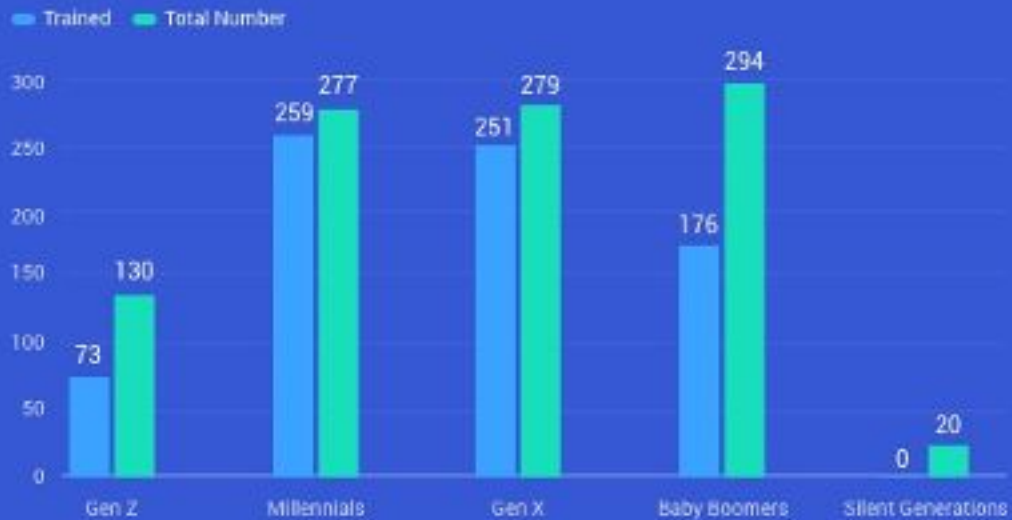

Job Status of Those Who Have Access to Call and Text Security Training

For participants having access to call and text security training, when they are further asked about the frequency, a majority (58.4%) have access to call and text security training only when something goes wrong. As is mentioned above, most of participants who have access to call and text security training are employed, it can be speculated that organizations care more call and text security training than individuals.

When categorized by age groups, the elderly (Baby Boomers and Silent Generations) show the lowest percentages among participants accessing call and text security training.

Trained participants categorized by age
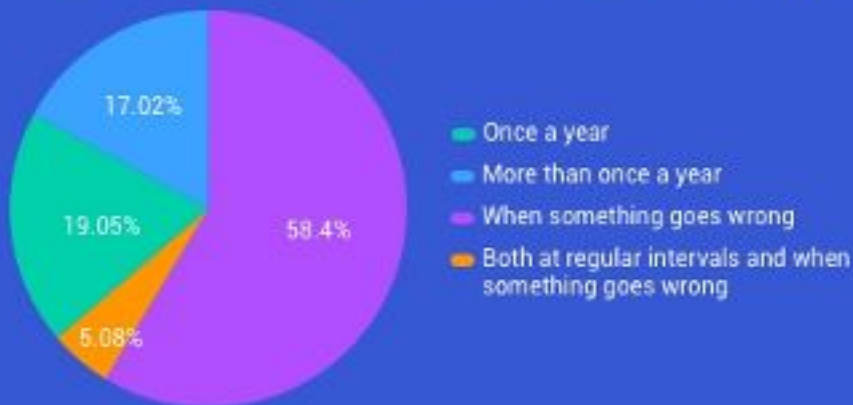
● Trained ● Total Number

Unfortunately, as a vulnerable group, there are insufficient protections for the elderly when it comes to call and text security.
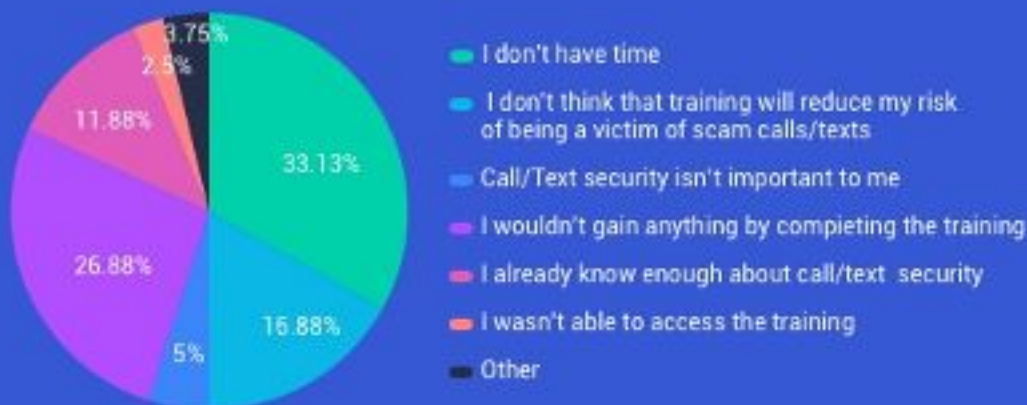
When it comes to the reasons why some participants have no access to call and text security training, 33.13% indicate that they don't have time for the training, taking up the largest percentage. The second largest percentage (26.88%) lies in those indicating that "I wouldn't gain anything by completing the training."

## Frequency of Those Who Have Access to Call and Text Security Training

- 17.02%
- 19.05%
- 5.08%
- 58.4%

Legend:
- Once a year
- More than once a year
- When something goes wrong
- Both at regular intervals and when something goes wrong

Reasons Why Call and Text Training Isn't Taken

- 3.75%
- 2.5%
- 11.88%
- 33.13%
- 26.88%
- 5%
- 16.88%

Legend:
- I don't have time
- I don't think that training will reduce my risk of being a victim of scam calls/texts
- Call/Text security isn't important to me
- I wouldn't gain anything by completing the training
- I already know enough about call/text security
- I wasn't able to access the training
- Other

" Why were you not reporting scam calls/messages? "

Reporting has been regarded as an essential way to protect against scam numbers. Unfortunately, it doesn't often take place in actual life. 32.2% of participants rarely report scam numbers and 29.5% sometimes. The two percentages account for the top two.

"How possible do you report scam numbers?"
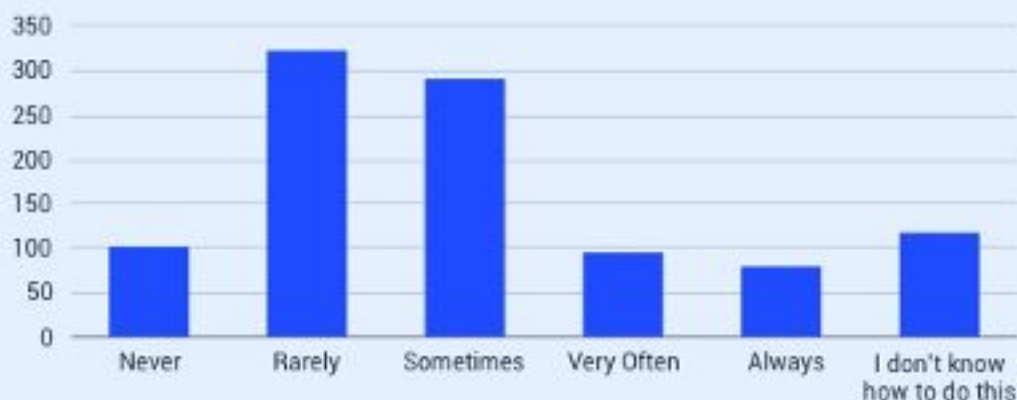
The main reasons for not reporting scam numbers include a small loss (16.43%), a sense of shame (15.49%), and a complicated reporting process (15.02%). These factors are the top three hindrances to reporting scam numbers to relevant organizations.

Reasons for Not Reporting Scam Numbers

- I didn't have time
- I didn't know who to report it to
- I didn't know how to report it
- The process was too much effort
- There was no point as no action would have been taken
- I forgot
- I was too ashamed to have falen for the scam
- The amount of money/ data loss was too samill or unimportant to me
- Other
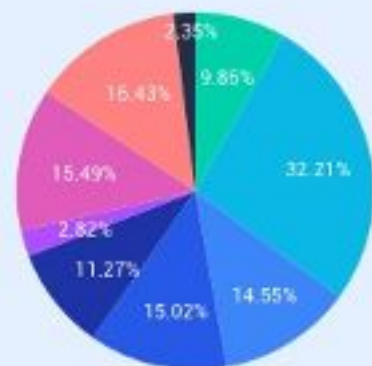
In addition, among all the participants who have reported scam cases, the targets they reported to vary from person to person. Most participants (44.99%) reported scam cases to the police, or another government agency like FCC and the lowest percentage of participants (4.70%) told their family.

"Who did you report scam cases to?"

17.53%

4.7%

44.99%

32.78%
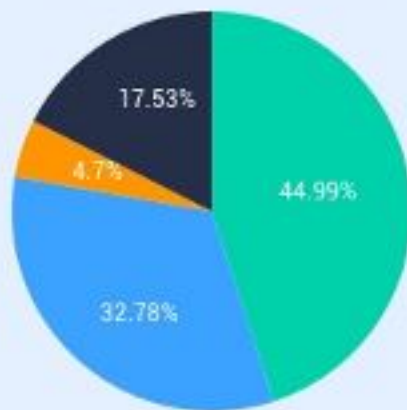
- The police, or another government agency (like FCC)
- My phone number provider
- I told my family, when then took action on my behalf
- Other

Up to now, there's still a boundary between victims and reporting action and victims are not that so driven to report scam numbers even if they have truly suffered from losses. Some victims even didn't realize that would be a scam unless they were asked about it.

# " I presume my numbers are automatically secure. "

When it comes to participants' attitudes to number security, a majority (41.6%) don't think their numbers automatically secure and 24.3% either agree or disagree. In other words, most of participants feel insecure about their numbers as they are used for calls and texts.

Attitudes about the statement "I presume my numbers are automatically secure"

- Agree — 34.1%
- Either agree or disagree — 24.3%
- Disagree — 41.6%

When asked about the responsibility for protecting numbers, most participants (29.7%) think it should rely on technology industry and a little lower percentage (26.4%) on the government.

"Who do you think is most responsible for protecting your number?"
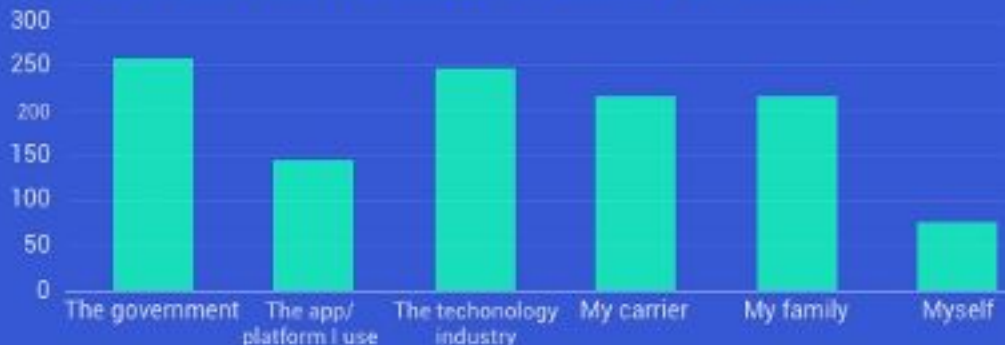
According to Lisa (Millennials, employed), one of the participants, she said "I hope there's a tool that can automatically protect me against scam calls and texts through some filtering and identifying schemes. Whenever an unknown caller calls me, it can quickly identify whether it should be answered or not."

What do people usually do when being confronted with calls and texts from unknown numbers? That's also included in our survey.

"What do you usually do when unknown calls or texts come?"
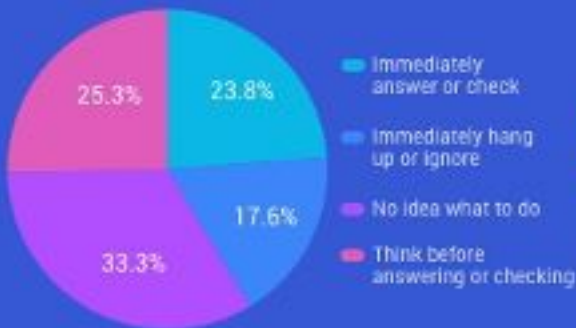
Attitudes about the statement "It's expensive to fully protect my phone number"

25.3% 23.8% 17.6% 33.3%

- Immediately answer or check
- Immediately hang up or ignore
- No idea what to do
- Think before answering or checking

24.5% 49.2% 26.3%

- Agree
- Either agree or disagree
- Disagree

It's clear that most people (58.6%) stand between a rock and a hard place and they don't go extremes, neither immediately receive nor immediately hang up. Moreover, they think it's possible to protect their numbers but it costs a lot since 49.2% of participants agree it is expensive to fully protect their phone numbers.

When asked about their knowledge about scam call/text blocker or app, the participants who know about it account for 46.7% while who don't for 53.3%, almost similar percentages.

Conclusion

RealCall Insights Center's recent survey revealed areas where Americans can strengthen their defenses against phone scams. While vulnerabilities exist, proactive strategies can significantly improve individual and organizational security.

✓ **Shield your digital footprint.** Consider using a separate phone number for critical accounts that store sensitive information, reducing the risk of data breaches.

✓ **Bridge the knowledge gap.** Prioritize security training within organizations to heighten awareness of phone scams, particularly among vulnerable groups like students and the elderly.

✓ **Report, don't ignore.** Reporting of suspected scam numbers to the FCC, your mobile service providers, or anti-scam services is important. Every individual's involvement bolsters protection, particularly for those less familiar with and more susceptible to scam schemes.

✓ **Beyond external reliance.** While entities like the FCC and FTC have made strides against illegal robocalls, collective action from individuals and organizations remains essential in fortifying community protection.

While the majority acknowledges the importance of staying secure from scams, a significant portion feels it's beyond their control. The report underscores the need for accessible and effective training, streamlined reporting processes, and increased awareness about affordable and user-friendly scam call/text blocker tools. As we move forward, a collective effort is essential to bridge the gap between awareness and action, making the digital landscape safer for all users.

This report holds significant value for both organizations and individuals. For organizations, it is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of security training, ensuring that every staff member is fully aware of the importance of call and text security. This collective understanding is vital for safeguarding the entire ecosystem of the organization's data security.

As for individuals, taking proactive measures to protect against scam calls and texts is imperative. The effort invested in learning to safeguard their money and data through technology is worthwhile and essential.

RealCall

RealCall is an app that provides spam and scam call blocking and caller ID identification services for global users. Empowered by the vast and ever-evolving database and AI-based modeling, RealCall features top-notch accuracy of blocking. The Charitable Giving Program initiated by RealCall aims to make the world better via cutting-edge technology for individuals, families, and communities.

🌐 https://www.realcall.ai

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