If you still use a landline, you probably know the feeling: you return a call to a client or a family member and they say, “Your number came up as blocked.” Or the opposite happens. You try to reach someone who screens anonymous calls, and they never even see that you tried.

That is exactly where *82 comes in.

Working with business and residential phone systems across California, I still see star codes trip people up. Many of them were designed decades ago, long before smartphones, yet they still interact with modern VoIP, fiber, and cable voice in ways that matter for privacy, compliance, and convenience.

Let us start with the core question, then open out into what landlines look like today, who still offers them, and how caller ID control fits into the larger picture of phone systems.

The short answer: what *82 does on a landline

On most North American landlines, *82 is a per call override that **unblocks your caller ID** for the next call you place.

In other words:

If your line is set to hide your number by default, dialing *82 before a phone number tells the network, “Show my number this time.”

That is the exact opposite of *67, which blocks caller ID for a single call when your line is usually public.

Here is a common pattern I see in California offices. A doctor’s main office line is configured to block outgoing caller ID, to keep staff from giving the number out as a direct callback. When the doctor needs a patient to pick up on a specific call or to see the verified number on their display, they dial:

*82 555 123 4567

The patient’s phone now shows the office caller ID for that one call, even though most outbound calls from that line stay anonymous.

A few important details that people miss:

*82 only works if:

- Your carrier supports caller ID at all.
- Your line has “per line blocking” turned on, and you are overriding that setting.
- You dial it before the number, with no pause in between.

If your phone service is already set to show your number, *82 usually has no visible effect. On some systems it just gets ignored, on others you might get a brief recording before the call proceeds.

*82 vs *67 and the logic of caller ID blocking

To understand *82 properly, it helps to look at how carriers think about blocking.

There are two main layers:

First, **per line**. Your provider sets your number to either “show by default” or “hide by default.” Law offices, mental health providers, domestic violence shelters, and some home users choose to hide by default, to minimize how

often their number gets saved or shared.

Second, **per call overrides**. You can temporarily flip that default with quick codes:

- If your line normally shows, use *67 to hide your number on that call.
- If your line normally hides, use *82 to show your number on that call.

In practice, this means a staff member who works from home for a medical practice might keep their home VoIP line blocked by default, then use *82 when returning calls to patients who never answer anonymous calls. The same mechanism is used by sales teams that want to present a consistent business caller ID, even when calling from multiple extensions or remote locations.

One subtlety: not every type of “caller ID blocking” behaves the same on the other end. Some receivers see “Private,” some see “Anonymous,” some see “Unknown,” and some call screening services treat these differently. When I set up business phone systems, we test with a cross section of mobile carriers and major VoIP apps to see how blocks and reveals are labeled, then adjust defaults.

How to use *82 reliably

Here is a straightforward checklist that works for most analog, digital, and VoIP landlines in the United States and Canada.

1. Pick up the handset and wait for a steady dial tone.
2. Dial *82 and listen for confirmation, such as a brief stutter tone or beep.
3. Immediately dial the full 10 digit number, including area code.

4. Wait through the first ring, then check the receiving phone's display if you can, to ensure your number is shown.
5. If the code does not work, call your provider's support or check their online feature list; not all carriers implement every star code.

On office systems backed by a PBX or a cloud business phone platform, you might need to dial a prefix such as 9 for an outside line before *82. In that case your sequence might be 9, then *82, then the destination number.

Other useful star codes: *69, *77, and caller ID tools

While *82 is the focus here, businesses regularly ask about a few other codes that still matter on modern networks. Behavior can vary slightly by carrier, but the intent is fairly consistent.

Here is a brief reference that reflects how they usually work on traditional and VoIP landlines:

1. *67

   Per call blocking. Hides your caller ID on the next call, if your line normally shows it.

2. *82

   Per call unblocking. Reveals your caller ID on the next call, if your line normally hides it.

3. *69

   Call return. Automatically dials the last number that called you, when available. With robocalls and carrier spam filtering, this is less reliable than it used to be, but many residential lines still support it.

4. *77

   Anonymous call rejection. On carriers that support it, enabling *77 tells the network to silently block calls that have their caller ID intentionally hidden. Legitimate callers must unblock with something like *82 on their side, or adjust their per line setting.

5. *87

   Turn off anonymous call rejection on lines that used *77.

When we design a business phone system for California offices, we usually combine star code guidance with centralized controls in the PBX or hosted platform. That way, staff are not relying on memory as their only defense against privacy mistakes.

Landlines in 2026: who still offers them?

With so much marketing focused on mobile plans and fiber internet, a fair question is: **Which companies still offer a landline, and can you still get a simple line without internet?**

The short answer is yes, but it depends heavily on where you live and what kind of infrastructure is in the ground.

Traditional copper “POTS” (plain old telephone service) has been on a managed decline for at least a decade. In much of California, the big legacy phone companies have been shifting new installations to VoIP or digital voice over fiber or cable. That said, several types of providers still sell landline style services:

Regional incumbent carriers. In many states, AT&T and a successor of the old Bell system, such as Verizon in the East or Lumen (CenturyLink, Qwest heritage) elsewhere, remain responsible for the legacy network. They often still publish tariffs for voice only service, though the price can be higher than bundled packages. When clients ask “Can I just have a landline without internet?” the real answer is “Yes, but expect to pay a premium compared with bundles.”

Cable companies. Companies like Comcast, Spectrum, and Cox offer digital voice that behaves like a landline for most users, including star codes such as *82, but technically rides on their internet infrastructure. For many households, these are the cheapest landline phone service options without needing a separate internet contract, because the voice is treated as a low bandwidth add on.

Independent VoIP providers. Residential and small business VoIP offerings from outfits like Ooma, Vonage, and many smaller regional providers give you a dial tone through an adapter connected to your modem. Some clients ask, “Do landlines still work without internet?” In this context, no: if it is a VoIP based “landline,” it dies with your broadband. For some businesses, that is acceptable; for medical facilities and elevators, we usually recommend at least one true analog or cellular backup line.

Electric co ops and regional fiber providers. In parts of rural California and neighboring states, power co ops that built out fiber now bundle simple voice service. These can be a strong alternative to Verizon or AT&T traditional copper, especially where new construction made old plant obsolete.

For seniors on fixed incomes, the practical question often becomes, “Who is the cheapest landline provider?” Lifeline and state specific low income voice programs can reduce charges meaningfully, but the options vary by state. In California, we often steer seniors toward either a stripped down AT&T voice plan with Lifeline support or a basic cable digital voice line, depending on which infrastructure is more reliable at their address.

Landlines, VoIP, and business phone systems

From a business perspective, a “phone system” is not just a handful of lines. It is the set of tools that control who can reach your staff, how calls flow, and what happens when nobody answers. When someone asks, “What is a business phone system?” in 2026, they are usually talking about:

- The underlying carrier lines (analog, PRI, SIP trunks, or cloud numbers).
- The PBX or cloud platform that defines extensions, menus, queues, and voicemail.
- The physical devices and apps: desk phones, softphones, and mobile clients.

For California offices, the best business phone system often combines several things: reliable underlying connectivity, easy caller ID controls like *82 overrides at the user level, and straightforward management of auto attendants and call queues.

I am often asked, “Who has the best phone system?” or “Who is the number one phone company?” There is no single answer, because “best” depends on whether you care most about price, reliability, integration with CRMs, or global reach. If you focus on the United States, the biggest and most established telecommunications companies today include:

AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Comcast, Charter, and Lumen. Those are some of the major telecommunications companies that underpin a huge share of voice traffic and broadband. Layered on top are specialized cloud phone providers such as RingCentral, Zoom, 8x8, and others.

In terms of “top 3 phone service providers” for wireless in the US, the long running trio is AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile by subscriber count. On the wireline side, cable operators and regional fiber players complicate any simple top 3 list.

When we design systems for small and mid sized businesses, especially in regulated industries like healthcare or legal, the features that matter more than brand labels are:

- Consistent caller ID presentation, with easy control per extension.
- E911 support with correct dispatchable location.
- Robust call recording options with clear policies.
- Integration with existing tools such as Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace.

A well configured hosted PBX from a mid sized provider can serve a clinic far better than a generic offering from a national carrier, if it has the right mix of these capabilities.

Caller ID, compliance, and why *82 still matters

You might wonder why *82 still exists when almost every business system lets you pre configure caller ID on a portal. The reality is that laws, human error, and workflow quirks make per call overrides important.

In telehealth, for example, a therapist may normally block their ID for privacy, but occasionally must reveal a number so a mobile carrier does not classify their call as potential spam. In legal work, an attorney might hide their direct line when contacting opposing counsel, but reveal it when calling a court clerk who has strict anonymous call policies.

Per call overrides, whether using *67 or *82, effectively delegate some control back to the person placing the call. On older analog lines, this is nearly the only way to switch behavior without opening a ticket with the carrier. On modern VoIP and business systems, you might see *82 mapped to an explicit “show my main number” command on the PBX, even when the underlying carrier handles caller ID differently.

That said, there are edge cases where *82 will not do what you expect:

If your line does not support per line blocking at all, then *82 may simply be ignored. If the call is carried over certain types of toll free, international, or emergency routes, the network may override your preferences for regulatory reasons. And if you are using a mobile app that substitutes a cloud number for your actual cellular number, the *82 code may never reach the underlying carrier.

This is why, when we roll out new phone systems for businesses, we stage test calls to major carriers, to toll free numbers, to anonymous call rejection (*77) lines, and to consumer cell phones. Then we give staff specific guidance: when to rely on system level caller ID controls, when to use per call prefixes, and when not to promise anonymity at all.

Seniors, simplicity, and landlines that just work

A big share of remaining landline customers in California are seniors who simply want a phone that always rings, with large buttons and a loud ringer. They are not interested in the top 10 most popular phones or the top 20 phone brands. They want to hear their daughter, recognize their doctor, and reach 911 even if the power blinks.

When families ask “Which is the best landline phone provider for seniors?” or “What is the simplest landline phone for seniors?” I focus on three things:

First, reliability at that address. In some neighborhoods, cable voice is rock solid; in others, power or plant issues make a traditional copper pair a better choice. We test by asking neighbors what service goes out least often, not just reading marketing claims.

Second, handset design. There are excellent amplified phones with large keys, talking caller ID, and visual ring indicators. For many seniors, that is much easier to manage than even the easiest smartphone for an elderly person.

Third, cost control. Between Lifeline, senior discounts, and stripped down packages, a careful plan can keep monthly charges for a basic line in the range of 20 to 40 dollars in many markets. When someone asks, “How much is an AT&T landline per month for seniors?” the honest answer is that it varies by state tariffs, surcharges, and whether Lifeline applies. The published base rate is only part of the story.

When *82 and related codes enter the conversation with seniors, I usually keep it simple: either turn caller ID blocking off entirely for outgoing calls, or write a short, clear instruction card by the phone. Expecting someone in their late eighties to recall *82 and *69 from memory during a stressful call is unrealistic.

From “the phone company” to today’s telecom giants

The history behind all these codes and carriers explains a lot about why things feel fragmented.

For much of the 20th century, there was effectively one dominant American phone company: AT&T, often called “Ma Bell.” If someone from that era asks, “What was the old phone company called?” they are usually thinking of that integrated monopoly. It controlled most local and long distance service through a web of Bell Operating Companies.

In the 1980s, US regulators broke up this monopoly. That is why, when you hear questions like “What were the telephone companies in the 1980s?” or “What was the name of the telephone company in the 80s?” you might see references to the “Baby Bells” such as Pacific Bell, Bell Atlantic, NYNEX, Southwestern Bell, and others. Many of those old phone companies have since merged, rebranded, or disappeared in corporate restructurings.

Some examples of phone companies that no longer exist in their original form include GTE, MCI, WorldCom, and Qwest. Others, like Ameritech or US West, were absorbed into larger entities. When people ask, “What phone

companies are out of business?" they are often remembering logos from the 1990s that later vanished into mergers.

On the data side, the old internet dial up providers sparked another wave of nostalgia. Companies like AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, EarthLink, and regional ISPs defined early online life. If someone asks "What came before AOL?" or "What were the internet providers in the 90s?" the answer usually includes those names.

If you go back further, to the early 1970s, you reach what the internet was called in 1973: ARPANET. It was a government funded research network, not a consumer service. The first website ever, launched in 1991 at CERN, marked another threshold, when "the web" became a thing distinct from earlier bulletin board systems and proprietary services.

These transitions also revealed a darker side of connectivity. Questions about "the dark side of the internet" are not idle. Spam, phishing calls, caller ID spoofing, and robocalls all blend the telephone network and the data network in ways almost nobody predicted when ARPANET was experimental.

Caller ID control features such as *82 were designed for a more orderly world. Today they are one tool among many in managing privacy and trust in a noisy environment.

Modern phones, operating systems, and security choices

Although this article focuses on landlines and codes such as *82, many businesses and high net worth individuals live mainly on mobile and softphones now. That raises questions like "Which is the most popular smartphone operating system?" and "Which phone is least likely to be hacked?"

Globally, Android holds the largest share by device count. In the United States and some other affluent markets, iOS has a strong or dominant position. The "top 3 best phone brands" in global shipment terms tend to include Apple, Samsung, and one or more Chinese manufacturers such as Xiaomi or Oppo. Exact "top 10 most popular phones" lists change every year as models refresh.

From a practical security standpoint, the safest choice is usually:

Keep to mainstream platforms with long software support windows, such as current iPhones or mtinc.net Phone Systems Company California flagship Android models from Samsung and Google, and apply updates promptly. A fully patched mid range smartphone from a reputable vendor is realistically among the phones least likely to be hacked in everyday scenarios, provided the user avoids sideloaded apps and obvious phishing.

There is occasional curiosity about "What phone does Elon Musk use?" or "What phone does Donald Trump use?" or "What phone do most billionaires use?" Detailed answers change over time and are not always public, but in my work with high net worth clients, it is common to see a mix of iPhones and top tier Android devices, often with additional security apps or privacy focused communication tools layered on.

On the operating system side, beyond mobile, questions like "What are the 5 operating systems?" or "What are the top 10 most popular operating systems?" usually refer to major platforms such as Windows, macOS, Linux distributions, Android, and iOS, with smaller slices belonging to ChromeOS and various embedded systems. For business communications, the main intersection is how well a phone system's apps and softphones run on these platforms, and how clearly caller ID behavior such as *82 overrides are represented in each app.

Bringing it back to *82

For such a short code, *82 carries a lot of weight:

It lets you precisely control when your number appears on someone else's display, even if your default privacy setting is the opposite. It still works, in some fashion, on many legacy and modern landline style services, from copper POTS lines to digital voice. It interacts with other features such as anonymous call rejection (*77) and return call (*69), and it plays a small but real role in how businesses manage compliance, trust, and human connection over the phone.

If you rely on a landline or a business phone system, it is worth testing how *82 behaves on your specific service, documenting that behavior for staff, and combining it with thoughtful defaults. Used well, it reduces missed calls and awkward voicemails. Used blindly, it can give a false sense of privacy or visibility.

A little time spent understanding these small codes pays off, whether you are configuring a multi site phone system in California or simply trying to help a relative keep their landline useful for a few more years.