

# Take a number, says Bell

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Are you bored with your phone number?

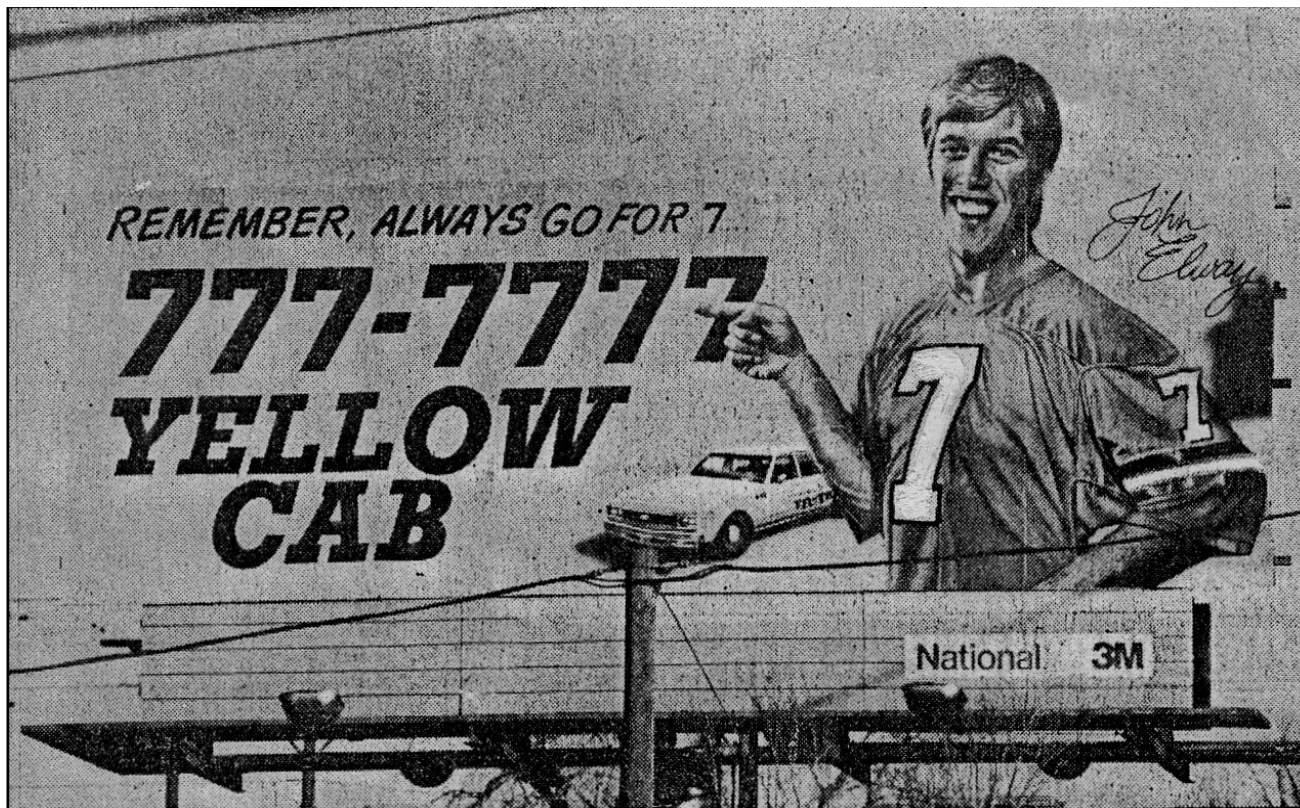
Would you like one with a much better ring to it, say, I-M-F-U-N-N-Y? Well, Mountain Bell has your number.

This week, the company begins offering Tele\*Marque, its personalized telephone number service, to Colorado customers. For a \$50 initial charge plus \$3 a month, residence customers can choose easy-to-remember, custom phone numbers if they are not already in use.

For businesses, the initial fee is \$250 and the monthly charge is \$10. Mountain Bell, which serves seven Western states with a total of about 5 million phone numbers, began offering the service in Wyoming in early December.

Public utility commissions in five of the states Mountain Bell serves have approved the service. State approval is still needed in New Mexico and Montana.

There's some indication that the launch of Tele\*Marque will trigger the trading of "vanity numbers" by private parties. A Denver carpet care firm has already been offered \$50,000 for its phone number -- 444-4444.



The Denver Post / Glen Martin

Yellow Cab's Billboard at Leetsdale and Holly makes a big pitch for its hard-won telephone number

Tele\*Marque Product Manager David Rivera said the company has helped customers obtain specially requested numbers for free in the past, but that the service was proving too costly. Mountain Bell has been processing 75,000 requests a year for special numbers.

However, Rivera said that even with charges for the service — a cousin to customized license plates — Mountain Bell expects a strong response for Tele\*Marque numbers from "businesses, singles, the elderly and families with young children."

Several subsidiaries of other Bell operating companies, including Pacific Bell and the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co., have been selling special numbers for some time.

If the recent "taxi telephone number war" between Denver's Yellow Cab and Metro Taxi is a model, Mountain Bell may be on to something with its custom service.

Metro fired the first salvo in that battle a little more than a year ago when it bought Ritz Cab. Metro's owners went out to get an easy-to-remember number from Mountain Bell. The taxi firm cajoled the phone company to release 333-3333, a service number used by company technicians.

Last fall, Yellow Cab set out to get a number as easy to remember as Metro's. First, Yellow made a bid for 444-4444, the number held by Martin & Peterman Inc., the carpet firm.

Mitch Martin said that nine years ago his company had unmercifully pestered Mountain Bell to get it to release 444-4444, also a service number at the time.

"They were using it as a testing number in a manhole," Martin recalled, relishing his firm's coup.

At the start, there were some drawbacks, he admitted. "In the first couple years, we got a lot of crank calls, kids punching out seven 4's." That subsided, however, and now he's sold on the phone number's benefit as a marketing tool. "A lot of people don't know our name, but they know our number," he said...

Martin & Peterman's number carried quite an allure for Yellow Cab..

"We were inclined to pay as much as \$100,000 for it," said Yellow's director of marketing Joe Gagan. But negotiations with the carpet firm's owners broke down, and Yellow went back to Mountain Bell last fall and convinced it to release 777-7777, yet another company-held service number, merely for installation charges.

"For us, it was the luckiest thing, like hitting a gold mine," Gagan said. "We think it's worth a million dollars." In November, Yellow Cab launched a number of billboard advertisements throughout the Denver area featuring the city's most famous No. 7, John Elway, and the slogan "Remember, Always Go For 7."