**SENTRY CALL BLOCKER**

<https://www.telsentry.com/pages/sentry-3>

This is going to be the long(est) compilation based on the info I gathered while reading 230+ reviews and 145+ Q&A on Amazon as of 13 June 2018. Thanks a lot to all contributors!

My comments based on personal experience with Sentry are prefixed with "MM:".

This document is published on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/review/RPEWPGQU1BMIV>.

SENTRY SPECIFICATIONS

White and Black list: 1500 numbers (combined total phone numbers from both lists).

Call log: 50 numbers.

Custom message: 20 seconds.

Answering machine: 2 messages, 30 seconds each.

Power: 3 AAA batteries (not included), lifetime 1 to 6 months.

CallerID: FSK / DTMF.

Box contents: 1 Sentry call screener, 1 phone cord, 1 user's manual, 1 quick start guide.

There are no protective plastic strips on the new Sentry units.

MY ENVIRONMENT

Sentry version: 3.1.

Date of purchase: 13 June 2018.

Connection type: In series, no DSL filter.

Sentry settings: Default.

Phone model: DECT Gigaset SL450A GO with 3 handsets, Black List not activated.

WHITE AND BLACK LISTS (both empty by default)

The phone numbers are stored in numerical order.

MM: The number can be up to 32 digits (16 of them are visible on Sentry display when viewing the list), the name can be up to 16 characters. Entered name is not transferred to the phone as Caller ID CNIP (Calling Name Identification Presentation).

Black listed caller: All phones and Sentry will show the caller's ID. Caller will hear one ring and a hang-up click. You will hear the Sentry and all phones ring once. If the Sentry is set to zero rings, the Sentry and base station and wireless handsets connected to it will not ring. But the other phones directly connected to a wall jack will ring once. MM: Sentry doesn't ring once. If the Sentry is set to zero rings, the Sentry doesn't ring, but the phone sometimes rings once. To prevent the phone from ringing once and displaying CID, activate the Black List on the phone in Block Call mode.

The Sentry cannot edit entries in white/black list. To modify an entry make note of the phone number in case you forget it, then delete the entry. Next, enter the same number as a new number, press "accept" and type in any name you want, including a desired nickname etc. The Sentry will display the calling number and the new name you entered.

RINGS

Once the Sentry picks up, it cannot re-ring the line.

When a number is already on the whitelist and that number calls in, the Sentry doesn't ring, only your phone rings.

The Sentry will only ring when an unlisted caller dials 0 after the voice prompt.

If the caller presses zero, after a short delay your phone will ring anew. MM: Wrong, the phone doesn't ring, only Sentry does.

Any devices parallel to the Sentry will always ring once when the screening occurs.

It's not possible to lower the ring volume on Sentry.

CALLER ID (CID)

The phone does not display the blacklist caller's Caller ID details as they are blocked soundlessly. MM: not sure what "Caller ID details" means, but my phone displays CID.

You can see the number calling on the Sentry. You can press "Accept" button to accept the call, or you can press, "Reject" button to reject the call. MM: pressing "Accept" or "Reject" does nothing.

If your phone is not displaying CID, change the setup from in series to parallel connection.

The date and time on Sentry is set automatically from the caller ID.

The phone number and ID from caller ID are saved in the white list.

OUTGOING MESSAGE (OGM)

This device has a recording that immediately tells callers to hit the '0' key while a robot dialer is still searching for a telemarketer to connect the call to after it has been answered. Since the telemarketer doesn't hear that message, they never press '0', and the call is never connected to you.

"If you are a telemarketer or solicitor, please hang up and remove this number from your call list! Otherwise press 0 to connect or leave a message".

"We're blocking all Robocalls, but if you're a live person that we might want to talk to, please press zero, hang-up, and redial and you'll be put through. You'll only have to do this one time".

OGM only plays when the caller's number doesn't exist in whitelist AND blacklist.

The problem is that the Sentry's default outgoing message does not tell the caller when to begin speaking. From his perspective the line just stops ringing and goes silent. This has lead to a few new callers leaving messages which were truncated by Sentry. If you wish to make things easier, you can create your own outgoing message instructing the caller to press 0 and leave a message when the ringing stops.

If a new number calls that is not in the white list, as long as they do not hang up the phone, the OGM will keep playing over and over again, giving them a chance to press 0 (zero). If you do not have an OGM telling users to press zero, then it will just put the caller in an infinite loop (I don't know how many times it will play before dropping the call). MM: default or custom OGM plays twice, then hang-up.

To overcome the static and low volume of the outgoing message, unplug all of the telephone lines, turn the unit upside down and speak with a bold voice directly into the speaker holes on the bottom of the unit. Don't speak close to the mic, put it about 4-5 feet away when you speak. It won't ever be clear, but at least it won't be completely garbled. MM: none of these solutions work to improve OGM quality.

PRESSING "0"

Caller's pressing 0 does not let the call come through (repeatedly ring the phone), it just adds the number to the ACCEPT list and lets the caller leave a message.

When a caller presses 0, only the Sentry will ring. There might be an issue hearing this ring from certain area of your house.

The caller's number won't be added to the blacklist if 0 isn't pressed, but the call won't get through. If they call again after hanging up without pressing 0, the caller will continue to be challenged to press 0 each time, just like the first time.

If a caller quickly presses the "zero", sometimes the Sentry will not get the signal. To overcome this weakness, I have a very specific outgoing message: "You have reached "name's" junk call blocker. To reach my home, press and hold zero for a few seconds, hang up and redial my number. Once again, press and hold zero for a few seconds, then hang up and redial my number. Thank you". MM: no matter how quickly I tried to press "0" on my cellular smartphone, Sentry always recognize it reliably.

A company who knows about the "0" key press could simply program their computer dialing system to enter that character and then the next time they call their number will be approved and bypass the Sentry.

SENTRY'S ANSWERING MACHINE

The Sentry's answering machine activates after 9 rings have passed since the caller had pressed "0".

The number of rings cannot be configured.

The old message will be overwritten by the new if the messages exceed 2.

To delete the voice message on the Sentry, first press REC/PLAY button to play the message. Then double click DEL/EXIT button while the message is playing to erase it. Repeat the steps if there is another message.

The answering machine on the Sentry cannot be disabled.

MM: The caller hears the same ring as the Sentry produces over its speaker for the user.

YOUR PHONE'S ANSWERING MACHINE

You can use your own answering machine to pick up calls from numbers on the whitelist.

ALLOW 0 RING (not set by default)

By factory default, Sentry allows the first ring so it can display CID on all phone models. However, if you hate that one ring, you can switch to ALLOW NO RING mode (to do this, press the RING button to toggle). But this way, some Panasonic phones will not show CID. MM: As I said before, sometimes the phone rings once even with "ALLOW 0 RING" setting.

The ALLOW 0 RING (vs. ALLOW 1 RING) setting, also known as "first ring suppression" only affects any phone connected to the phone port of the Sentry, and only comes into play with rejected and screened calls. When enabled, the phone connected to the Sentry won't even ring once for such calls. The manual states that this setting is known to disaffect CID display of some phones and some users have reported this to be the case with certain Panasonic phones. But it only applies to a phone connected to the phone port of the Sentry. It wouldn't affect the CID display of the Sentry nor any other phone or CID display connected directly to the line in parallel with the Sentry.

If you don't let the first ring through (my choice), your phones stay silent unless the caller is on the white list. This means they may not pick up the caller ID information, even if the caller is on the white list, because they don't get to hear the 1st ring. For some reason, some phones are better at picking up the Caller ID in this case than others. My AT&T DECT wireless phones pick it up; my Plantronics headset and dedicated Caller ID display do not. MM: My Gigaset phone doesn't display CID with "ALLOW 0 RING" setting.

When set to 0 ring mode, I cannot make outgoing calls until I change the ring mode to 1 ring. Also in 0 ring mode, you will have to change the batteries every 30 or 40 days. MM: I have no problems making outgoing calls with "ALLOW 0 RING" setting.

RINGER ON/OFF (set to ON by default)

The ringer on or off has no affect on CID display. MM: assuming CID on Sentry display, this applies to numbers in white list, black list, or not in any list.

If Sentry's ringer is set to zero, the caller ID will not show on the wireless handsets. But, Caller ID will show on phones directly connected to the wall jack. MM: The Sentry's ringer on/off setting is not related to CID, which is always displayed on wireless handsets.

Ringer Off setting only affects the Sentry's built-in externally audible ring sounder, and only comes into play with screened calls, and then only if/when the caller pushes 0. It has no affect on any phones.

If Sentry has a tendency to freeze and refuse to release the calls, set the Ringer back to On (after Sentry reset by reconnecting the phone line and reinstalling the batteries).

SENTRY ON/OFF (ON by default)

You can turn the Sentry off, but it won't be completely off. It will still block all the black listed numbers and numbers with no caller id. But numbers it doesn't recognize will come thru normally. This is useful if you are expecting a service's call or a call from a doctor's office etc. Also, if the "replace batteries" is flashing, Sentry will default to this mode as well.

AREA CODES BLOCKING (not set by default)

You can block an entire area code but add numbers from that area code to your white list and the numbers in the white list will still ring through. MM: There is an error in Sentry Quick Start Guide: "Phone numbers on the Accept List will be affected". It should be read as "Phone numbers on the Accept List will NOT be affected".

The Sentry does not have the allow by area code feature. The accept list has to be compiled with the caller's complete phone number (area code + 7 digit number, some services require the 1 prefix). MM: When compiling area codes list, the prefix may be required as well.

BATTERIES

Remember to replace the batteries at least every 6 months. I had a service call placed to my phone company because all the phones were dead, which had all been working earlier in the day.

If you miss the low battery light on your machine, then it locks up your phone. It says "Line in use" and you can't make or receive calls when this happens.

When the batteries die the unit passes all calls and does not block anything.

Always disconnect the telephone cords before replacing the batteries.

The metal contacts in the battery box are very soft. So soft, that if you remove the batteries and replace them, the unit will not come on because the contacts don't touch the battery. MM: I cannot confirm this.

The Sentry will retain the data when the batteries are removed. MM: I confirm that Sentry retain the data in white and black lists for at least 8 hours.

USAGE SCENARIOS

When I get a call now, I only look if it rings 2 times. 1 ring means the Sentry stopped them.

I don't want to hear the Sentry OR my phone ring for a not-on-my-list call. That requires two actions: Turn the ringer OFF (the Sentry) and choose ALLOW 0 RING (your telephone).

If all you want is just block all callers that are not on your whitelist, you need to record a custom outgoing message leaving out dial 0 instruction. The recording can be anything you want or it can be short click. The Sentry can work by itself without any telephones connecting into it. Just plug it into any functioning phone jack.

The Sentry can connect directly into the modem or a phone jack. A phone splitter can be used if necessary.

I chose to turn off the ringing on incoming calls unless they are on the white list, so I hear nothing when a caller is on the black list or does not dial 0 when speaking with the Sentry. I also chose to turn off the ringer in the Sentry, and to discourage using the crappy answering machine in the Sentry. My outgoing message does not invite the caller to leave a message; instead it asks them to dial 0 and call back. Here is my outgoing message: "Hi, this is Bob. If you are a telemarketer or calling about a survey or solicitation, please hang up and don't call again. Anyone else, please dial 0 to be added to my approved callers list, then call back and my phone will work normally. Thanks!". I think this will work well and will update this if it doesn't ... this is still my first day.

I discovered that a better way to build up a list of numbers to pass through and block is to turn off the auto-answer, and at the end of the day scroll through the calls and put each into the "Accept" or "Reject" list.

I have our device set up to ring just once if a robocall or telemarketer comes calling, so I know that the device is working and thwarting those callers.

TROUBLESHOOTING

I was having an issue with the unit showing that my line was in use and hearing a constant busy signal from the call blocker. I switched the unit from the serial connection to parallel and the unit is working great!

Yesterday evening I discovered I couldn't make outgoing calls. I unplugged the line and removed the batteries to "reset the unit." It didn't help. I tried it several times. I was super frustrated. On a whim I decided to "mess with it." I added a dummy Accept, added a dummy Reject, then deleted both of them. The Sentry resumed working.

TO-DO IN THE NEXT VERSION OF SENTRY

01) Improve sound quality of OGM and answering machine.

02) Add AC adapter, leave the battery(ies) as a backup for power outages.

03) Add backlight to LCD, better switch to (color) TFT.

04) "ALLOW 0 RING" setting should really prevent the first ring on any telephone, no matter of the brand and model.

05) Considerably extend the User Guide. Among others, add description and usage scenario of LINE1 and TEL1 jacks (alternative wiring).

06) Implement web interface for convenient device use and configuration through Wi-Fi. For example, it will allow the user to specify the names for phone numbers in different (non-English) language, which will definitely increase Sentry sales worldwide.

07) Add firmware update capability.

08) Implement the ability to add the current call to black or white list from any handset by pressing #2 or #3 on its keypad accordingly.

09) Add automatic contacts synchronization with cellular phones, Google, Outlook.

10) Provide special area in whitelist for VIP numbers which cannot be erased when the whitelist is full.

11) Allow the user to set the volume of Sentry's ringer.

12) User should be able to set the number of rings the Sentry allows before activating its own answering machine.

13) Add a year to the date/time stamp of incoming calls. Considering large amount of memory (1500 numbers), this would be useful.

14) Provide an easy and quick way to reset the Sentry, for example by using a button near battery compartment. Currently the user has to wait 5-10 minutes after removing the batteries—too long.

15) Select better components (the keyboard at first).

16) Improve assembly quality (refuse China and similar countries).

Not sure about all consumers, but personally I am ready to pay for significantly improved version of Sentry up to $150.