KaiCalls

KAICALLS

Money Walking Out the Door

Phone Calls, AI and Automation for Owners Who Answer Their Own Phone

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KAICALLS

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Foreword

The business phone call is a request for work that reaches a small business in real time, usually while the owner is out doing the job the last caller booked. For an owner-operator who answers their own phone, that call has no front desk behind it. It rings on a lawn in the middle of a tent install and on the kitchen counter at nine at night.

The business phone call has a few fixed properties, and each one can be counted. One person can hold one call at a time, so the second caller in a busy hour gets voicemail. A caller who reaches nobody tends to try the next company instead of waiting. The callback is a separate job from the first ring, with its own clock. Calls keep coming after hours and all through the busy season, when the owner is either off or on site. And a call can be answered and still fail, because the change the customer asked for never makes it onto the order.

Automation is the second subject, and it gets the same plain accounting. Software can pick up a call, take down a name and a date, send a text and pass the details to the owner. It gives time back only when the steps of a job are written down first and the owner approves anything before it goes out to a customer. On a phone line it also has rules to follow. It has to disclose itself and get consent where the law requires it, and it has to say it does not know an answer instead of guessing one.

Connor Gallic comes to the subject as a marketer who became a builder. He grew up in a family of entrepreneurs who never had enough time and rarely had the margin to hire help. His working life ran through social media marketing, marketing for eighteen car dealerships in New Jersey, a telemedicine company his father had started, and a player-to-player marketplace inside a video game. The phone came later. His father's tent company had a missed-call problem, and his father called to ask how to use the AI answering companies he kept seeing. Connor found them weak at the time and started building his own as the technology improved. He now runs his own business mostly through automated systems he set up himself, so the automation chapters read like someone describing tools he uses every week.

The book is drawn from Connor's own recorded conversations about the calls and systems he works with: interviews about his career and the family business that started the work, and shorter recordings made while he explained missed calls and what an automated line should and should not do. Every quotation in these pages is his.

The chapters come in two parts. Part One stays on the phone itself. It opens on the owner's own money in *What a Missed Call Costs You*, then works through the free fixes, the callback, after-hours calls and the gap between an answered call and a changed order, and it closes on a weekly count an owner can keep on a whiteboard. Part Two turns to AI and automation in the same order: the hours spent doing everything by hand, why automation stalls in a small business, which calls should stay with a human voice, and how to prove an automated step paid for itself. A last chapter puts both parts into one week of work, in order.

Some chapters carry more weight than others. *What a Missed Call Costs You* comes first because every later page assumes the owner has put a number on the calls already going unanswered. *Calling Back Before They Call Someone Else* takes up how fast a missed caller needs to hear back and which calls to return first. *Ground Rules for AI on Your Phone Line* sets out what an automated line has to tell callers and what it should never send without the owner's sign-off.

Nothing in the book tells a rental owner how to stake a tent or a contractor how to price a job. It stays on the phone and the systems around it, the part of a small business Connor works on every day. The owner stays the expert on everything else.

Read it with last week's call log open. The phone will ring again before the first chapter is over.

About the Author

[IMAGE: headshot] Connor Gallic, founder of KaiCalls, photographed for the author page. Supplied asset, not generated.

Connor Gallic is the founder of KaiCalls, a phone secretary service for small businesses. It picks up for owner-operators who answer their own business phone and spend most of the day out on the job, tent and party rental companies among them.

The work started with a phone call from his father. Connor grew up in a family of entrepreneurs who said for years that they wished they had more time and a little more money, and whose margins rarely let them hire someone to help. His father's tent company had a missed-call problem, and one day his father called him to ask how to use the AI answering companies he kept seeing, because he wanted to test them. Connor looked at them, found them weak at the time, and started building once they began to get better.

Before the phone, Connor Gallic spent his career on marketing and the systems behind it. He is a college dropout. He was brought in to run marketing across all eighteen OpenRoad car dealerships in New Jersey, took over the online telemedicine company his father had started, and built the player-to-player marketplace for the video game Kompete. He now runs his own business mostly through automated systems he set up himself. What he knows about calls comes from the line itself. According to KaiCalls' month-one ledger (September 2026), the service had logged 9,434 calls through September 1, 2026, and 657 of the 690 calls in August 2026 completed.

Connor Gallic has never run a tent or event rental business, and he is not a lawyer or a licensed professional in any trade a reader of this book works in. The rental examples in these pages come from his father's company and a rental business he set up phones for, told as what he saw. Every quote in the book comes from his own recordings.

Owners who want a secretary picking up their own business number can set one up on KaiCalls and keep the number their customers already have.

Introduction

So my dad calls me one day. He and my uncle run a tent and party rental company, and he had a problem with missed calls. The crew would be out delivering and setting up, and the phone kept ringing. He goes, “Connor, how do we use these AI voice companies?” Then, “I see them. I wanna test them.”

So I looked at them. They were all pretty trash back then. Over time they got a little better, then better again. So I was like, fine, let me start building this.

None of this was new to me. I grew up in a family of entrepreneurs, and the line I heard from them my whole life was “I wish I had more time.” Right behind it came wishing for a little more money and for someone to help out. And most of the time they couldn’t hire that someone, because a small business doesn’t have big margins. So if you answer your own business phone, and you’re the one on the job when it rings, this book is for you. You’re one person with one phone, and the phone doesn’t wait for you to finish the job.

So that’s where the title comes from. A caller who gets no answer is a paying customer turning around at your door, and you never even see them go. The book comes in two parts. Part One is the phone itself: what a missed call costs you, the fixes that cost nothing, calling people back before they call somebody else, and counting your calls every week. Most of it you can do without buying anything. Part Two is AI and automation. It covers what you can hand off and what should stay in your own hands, and it ends on the ground rules for putting AI on your phone line.

Let me tell you what building all of this did to my own work. Jobs I used to hand to a team, I now run alone. These days my business runs mostly on systems I set up, and every so often one of them surprises me by still working. But even with all of it running, I still want to talk to my customers. People want a person on the other end when it counts. A big part of this book is figuring out which calls need you and which ones don’t.

Anyways, grab your phone before you start. You’re going to want last week’s call log for Chapter 1.

01

CHAPTER ONE

What a Missed Call Costs You

You're on a job. Your hands are full. The phone buzzes in your pocket and you let it ring, because you can't drop what you're doing every time somebody calls. An hour later you pull it out. One missed call. No voicemail. A number you don't recognize.

So what did that cost you? Nobody sends you a bill for it. It doesn't show up in your bank account or on your taxes. And that's the whole problem with it. The cost of a missed call is a job that went to somebody else, and you never find out which job or which somebody.

This chapter puts a number on it. Your number, built from your calls and your prices, worked out on the back of an invoice. No industry average, and no scary statistic from a company trying to sell you something.

> *"You're losing business. I don't care who you are. That's just the fact. Every time you miss a call, that's money walking out the door. Say what you want, that's just the God's honest truth about it."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON WHAT A MISSED CALL COSTS

The caller on the other end of that ring

Flip it around and stand where the caller is standing. They need something done, maybe this weekend. They search, they find you, they tap your number. It rings and rings.

The caller has no idea you're up to your elbows in a job. All they know is that nobody answered. Most of them don't sit there and wait for you to get free. They go back to the search results and tap the next business on the list. And if that one doesn't answer either, they try the one after that. The job goes to whoever answers first, and a lot of the time that's just the company that had a free hand at that exact moment.

Voicemail doesn't catch all of it either. Plenty of callers hang up without leaving a message, so your missed-call list is often a number with no name and no reason attached.

Calling back later is harder than it sounds. According to [Pew Research Center's 2020 survey on unknown callers], eight-in-ten Americans say they don't generally answer their cellphone when an unknown number calls. To somebody who called you once, your number is still a stranger's number.

So the clock starts the second it stops ringing. Every hour between the missed call and your callback is an hour that caller spends looking for somebody else, and some of them find somebody.

Speed matters even when people do want to hear back. Researchers writing in the 2011 Harvard Business Review study on online sales leads found firms that tried to reach a lead within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to have a meaningful conversation with a decision maker as firms that tried even an hour later. Those were web-form leads, mostly at bigger companies, and not phone calls to a small shop. Still, it points the same direction owners feel every week. Interest cools fast.

Pricing your missed calls on the back of an invoice

Let me do some math for you. Grab an invoice, a receipt, whatever paper is closest to you right now. Every number you write on it comes from your own business, not from mine and not from some report.

Start with last week's missed calls. Open the recent calls list on your phone and count the ones you didn't pick up. Don't guess. Count.

Now cross some of them off, because not every missed call is a lost job. Some are robocalls, wrong numbers and people selling you something. Some are price shoppers who were never going to book with you no matter who answered. Be honest here, and be a little tough on yourself. What's left is the calls that could have turned into work.

Last, write down what a normal job is worth to you. The normal one you do most weeks, and not your biggest job of the year.

Now multiply. Say you missed 8 calls last week and crossed off 6 as junk and shoppers. The 2 that are left would have booked. Say a normal job is worth $600 to you, so that's $1,200 of work gone to somebody else in one week. Say that pace holds for 50 working weeks, and it comes to $60,000 a year.

Your numbers will come out different. Maybe you only miss 3 calls a week. Say your normal job is $150, and it takes a lot of missed calls before it hurts. Good. Now you know that too.

Rough is fine, as long as it's yours. Then when somebody tells you what missed calls cost, you can hold their number up against the one you built yourself.

An owner staking down a party tent in a backyard while a phone rings unanswered on a folding table behind them.

Why a hire just to catch the calls rarely adds up

So the obvious fix is to hire somebody to answer the phone. Every owner hears that one.

Most small business owners can't pay a person to sit next to a phone all day. People look at a local shop and figure the owner is raking it in. Usually they're making a reasonable living and not much more, and a full-time salary for somebody whose whole job is picking up is a big bite out of that.

And a hire doesn't fix the whole thing. A person still takes one call at a time. A person still goes home at the end of the shift and takes a day off when they're sick. Chapter 2 gets into why that limit is built into the job itself.

Plenty of owners land somewhere in the middle. A family member answers when they can, or a part-timer covers the busy months. That helps, and it still leaves the hours nobody is covering.

Try this instead of taking anybody's word for it. Put your yearly missed-call number from the invoice next to what a full-time person would cost you in your area, with payroll taxes and everything else that comes with an employee. For a lot of small shops, the hire costs more than the calls they'd catch. For some busy shops, it doesn't. Do the math before you believe anyone on this, including me.

The number stays hidden until you write it down

Most owners aren't tracking their calls at all. They remember the good calls and the angry ones. The calls that rang out while they were busy on a job just disappear.

And the missed calls you can see are only part of it. A caller who couldn't reach you this spring might not bother trying you next spring either. That one never shows up on any list.

So for one week, keep a simple tally. Every missed call gets a line with the time it came in and what happened after. Did you call back? Did it turn into a job? Paper is fine. The notes app on your phone is fine. Chapter 7 turns this into a weekly habit, but one week is enough to get your first honest number.

Written down, a missed call has a date and a price next to it, and that's a lot harder to shrug off than a buzz in your pocket.

Common Questions

How much does a missed call cost a small business?

It depends on your numbers, and nobody can hand you an honest average for your business. So build it yourself. Take the missed calls from last week, cross off the junk and the price shoppers, and multiply what's left by what a normal job is worth to you. Then multiply by the weeks you work in a year. Write it on the invoice and hang on to the invoice. That number beats any figure a vendor prints.

Do customers call another company if you don't answer?

A lot of them do, and fast. Callers who reach nobody usually go back to the search results and try the next business on the list. The way I say it in my videos: *"They're just going to call the next guy, the next guy, till they get an answer."* The job goes to whoever picks up first. Calling back an hour later can still work, but by then some of those callers have already booked somebody else.

Is it worth hiring a receptionist to answer my business phone?

Sometimes, but do the math first. Put your yearly missed-call number next to the full cost of an employee in your area, including payroll taxes. For many small shops the hire costs more than the calls it would catch. A receptionist also takes one call at a time and works set hours, so some calls still get missed. Busy shops with steady call volume are the ones where a hire starts to make sense.

Can I just call back everyone I missed once I'm done working?

You can, and it's better than nothing. Just expect a lot of those calls to go unanswered. Pew Research Center found in 2020 that most Americans don't generally answer calls from numbers they don't know, and by evening some callers have already booked another business. The callback works best when it's fast and when the person knows who's calling. Chapter 4 walks through how to call back in the right order.

Chapter Reflection

A missed call never sends an invoice, so most owners never add it up. Once you've worked it out on paper with your own calls and your own prices, you know roughly what that buzz in your pocket is worth. The next question is why it keeps happening to owners who work hard and care about their customers, and Chapter 2 takes that on. Before you get there, write this week's missed-call number somewhere you'll see it tomorrow.

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CHAPTER TWO

One Person, One Phone and a Full Day of Jobs

If you miss calls, you've probably already given yourself the lecture. Keep the phone on you. Turn the ringer up. Check it between jobs. Pick up faster. And most owners already do all of that, and the calls still get missed.

So stop reading it as a discipline problem. Missed calls come from how a small business is built. You've got one phone and one pair of hands, and a day full of work that needs both.

This chapter starts with a tent crew I watched up close, then gets to your own calendar. Once you know where your misses come from, you'll know which of the fixes in the next few chapters are worth your afternoon.

> *"You might think that it doesn't happen, but it does because you're a person, you have to go to sleep, you have to use the bathroom, and you work too. So if you're really the only man manning the jobs, then you're always gonna miss those calls."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON WHY A ONE-PERSON SHOP MISSES CALLS

A tent crew out on a job while the phone rings

The business I know best is my dad and uncle's tent and party rental company. When the crew is working, they're out delivering and setting up tents at somebody's house. Nobody on that crew is standing next to a phone waiting for it to ring.

And the calls don't wait for the crew to get back. People call with questions about their event while the truck is still on the road. They call while everybody's hands are full at a setup. The phone rings the same whether the crew is sitting around or halfway through a job.

Missed calls turned into a real enough problem there that my dad called me about it, and that call is a big part of why I care about any of this. The Introduction tells that story.

What stuck with me from watching it is that nobody on that crew was ignoring the phone. They were out doing the work the phone was supposed to bring in. Calls got missed because the people who could answer them were busy earning the money.

So if you think you're just bad with the phone, look at where you were when it rang.

Two callers, one line

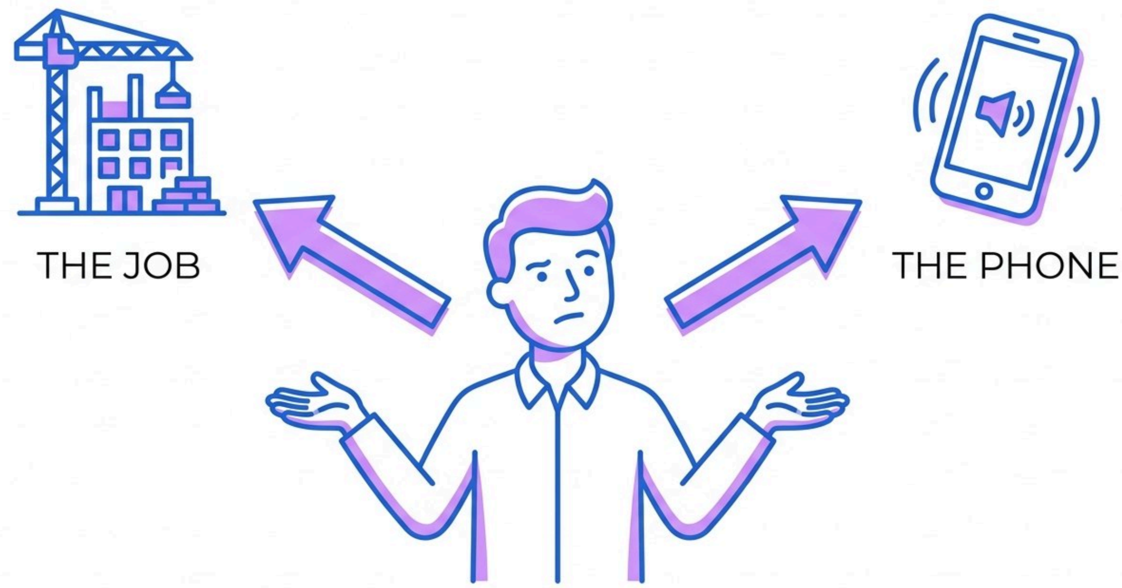
A phone line has a limit most owners never think about until it bites them. Say two people call your business at 10:15 on a Saturday morning. One of them gets you. The other gets voicemail, or a ring they won't wait through.

Hiring somebody raises that ceiling a little, and the ceiling is still there. A receptionist is still one person on one call. When two calls come in at once, one of those callers waits or goes somewhere else.

The phone also can't tell a booking from a robocall. It rings exactly the same for the person who wants to spend money with you and for the recording about your car's extended warranty. Every ring pulls you off the job the same amount, and you don't know which kind it was until you've already stopped.

The calls you do answer cost you something too. Say you pick up 10 calls during a workweek while you're on jobs. Each one takes a few minutes, and then it takes a few more to get your head back into what you were doing. None of that shows up on an invoice either, and some of those calls were questions you've answered over and over.

And a person has limits a phone line doesn't care about. You sleep. You eat. You drive between jobs. You go to your kid's game. The calls keep coming during all of it.



A single owner figure in the middle with one arrow toward THE JOB and one toward THE PHONE, showing both need the same pair of hands.

Line up your missed calls against your work calendar

Try a free exercise that tells you more than any report. Pull up last week's missed calls, the tally from Chapter 1 if you kept one. Then pull up your calendar or your job schedule for the same week. Put them side by side.

While you're at it, mark what you were doing when each call came in, in two or three words. On a delivery. At a setup. Driving. Eating lunch. A week of those notes shows you your real day, which might be busier than the one you'd describe if somebody asked.

Look at when the misses landed. You might find they cluster in the same stretches every week, like the hours you're out on jobs or driving between them. You might find a bunch of them came in early in the morning or after you'd gone home for the day.

If most of your misses land while you're out on jobs, the free fixes in Chapter 3 earn their keep right there. A voicemail greeting that says when you'll call back and a text that goes out when you can't answer both work while you're on the road. If the misses pile up in the evening, that's a different problem with different fixes.

Whatever the pattern is, it tells you where any fix has to work. A setup that only helps when you're sitting at a desk is useless if every missed call happened while you were on the road.

Chapter 5 gets into the calls that come in after hours and on weekends.

One rule while you're doing this. If you're driving, up high or working with something that needs both hands, the call waits. No job booked over the phone is worth getting hurt for. Catch those calls another way instead of answering more of them at the worst possible moment.

Most businesses are one person deep

If you answer your own phone, you've got a lot of company. According to the SBA Office of Advocacy's 2026 small business FAQ, 82.3% of U.S. small businesses, about 29.8 million firms, have no employees at all, based mostly on 2022 data. Most businesses in this country don't have a front desk. They have an owner with a phone in their pocket.

A bigger company has somebody whose whole job is the phone. In a one-person shop, the phone is one more job stacked on top of the actual work, the quotes, the invoices and everything else.

Meanwhile, nearly everybody calling you is holding a phone that makes switching businesses easy. According to Pew Research Center's mobile fact sheet, 98% of American adults own a cellphone, from a survey conducted in 2025. If you don't pick up, the next business on the list is one tap away.

So a missed call in a one-person shop is a staffing fact. You fix staffing facts with setup, and the cheapest setup comes first. Chapter 3 starts with the fixes that cost you nothing.

Common Questions

Why do small business owners miss so many phone calls?

Because they're the ones doing the work. An owner who answers their own phone is also driving, loading, meeting customers and sleeping, and the phone rings through all of it. One person can take one call at a time, and a robocall interrupts the job just as much as a real customer does. Caring more doesn't give you a second pair of hands.

Can one person answer two business calls at the same time?

No. One person can hold one conversation, so when two calls land together, somebody waits or gets voicemail. Hiring a receptionist doesn't remove that limit either. Talking about hiring a human secretary, I put it this way: *"It doesn't scale vertically. So if you have two calls coming* *in, only one of them can be picked up."* That's worth remembering when you look at your busiest hours.

How many small businesses in the U.S. have no employees?

Most of them. According to the SBA Office of Advocacy's February 2026 FAQ, 82.3% of U.S. small businesses have no employees, which works out to about 29.8 million firms. The figures come mostly from 2022 data. For anyone reading this book, it means that answering your own phone is normal. A front desk is something bigger companies have.

Should I answer the phone while I'm working on a job?

Answer when it's safe and you can give the caller real attention. If you're driving, up high or in the middle of something that needs both hands, let it go. A distracted answer can lose the job anyway. The better move is setting up what happens when you can't pick up, like a voicemail greeting that says when you'll call back, and then calling back fast. Chapters 3 and 4 cover both.

Is it unprofessional to let a business call go to voicemail?

No, as long as the caller hears something useful and you call back when you said you would. Voicemail is where a one-person shop's calls go while the owner is working. What looks unprofessional is a full mailbox that won't take a message, or a callback that comes two days later. Record a greeting that names your business and your callback times, then keep those times. Chapter 3 has a version you can copy.

Chapter Reflection

You didn't cause your missed calls by caring too little. You're one person with one phone, doing the work that the phone brings in, and that math doesn't change by trying harder. What changes it is deciding ahead of time what a caller gets when you can't answer, and the cheapest version of that is waiting in Chapter 3.

03

CHAPTER THREE

Free Fixes Before You Buy Anything

Before you pay anybody for anything, there's a lot you can fix with the phone you already have and an afternoon. None of it needs new software. Most of it needs a pen and one honest hour thinking about who calls you and why.

Some of this will sound too simple. The simple stuff is what most owners skip, and it's the stuff that keeps working after you forget you set it up.

This chapter goes in order. First you make it easier to pick up, and cut down how many calls need you at all. Then you set up what a caller gets when you can't answer, so a missed call turns into a callback instead of a lost job.

> *"For most small businesses, it's going to be one of three things. Are you open? What does it cost? And can I book? That is not phone call work. That should be a text message or something on your website."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON THE QUESTIONS BEHIND MOST CALLS

Pick up whenever your hands are free

The first free fix is the obvious one. When you're around and it's safe, answer. People like reaching a human, and nothing you buy later will beat you picking up and knowing the answer.

So make it easier to be the one who answers. Decide where the phone lives during the workday. In your pocket on vibrate is better than in the truck with the ringer on. If you've got a partner, a spouse or anybody else who can take calls, decide who the phone rings first and who it rolls to next. Ask your carrier or whoever runs your phone system how to set that order.

Then pick your callback blocks. Try two set times a day, say one around lunch and one before you head home. Those are the times you return every missed call, no exceptions. A callback block turns calling people back into a habit, and it lets you promise callers a time you can keep.

Write down every reason people call you

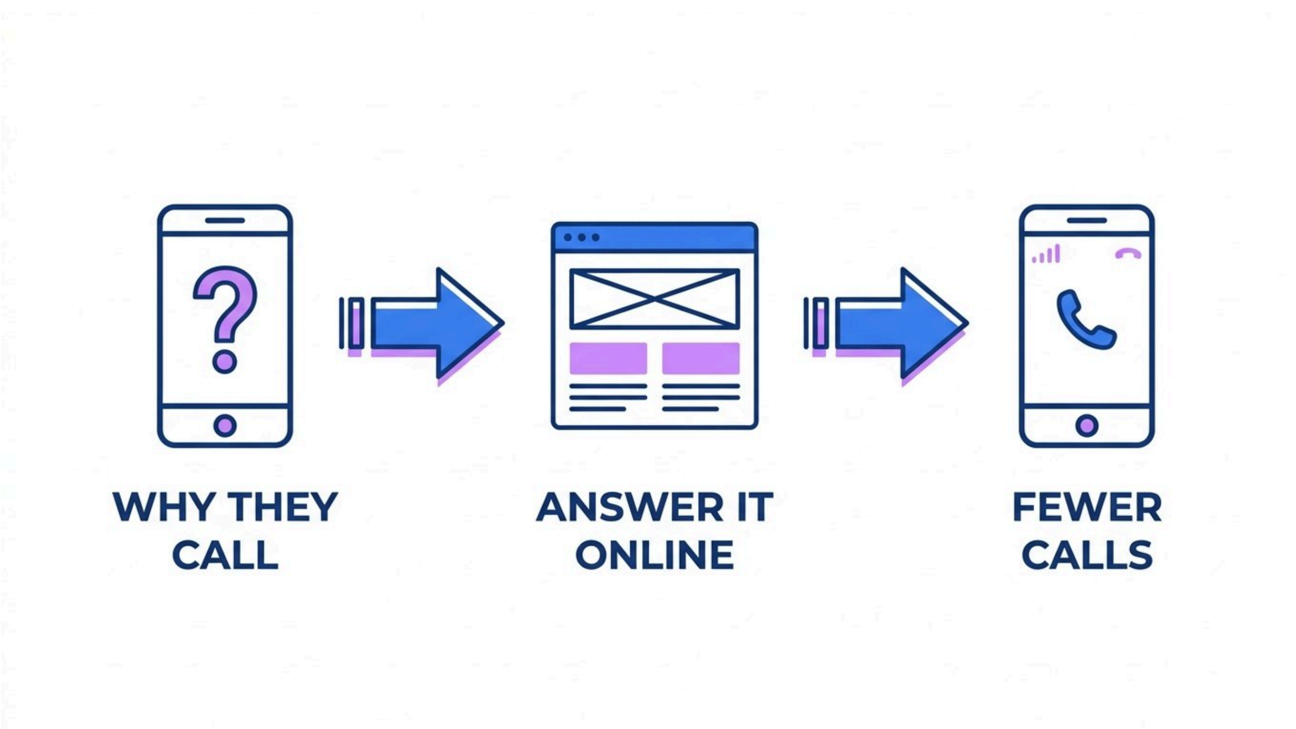
For one week, keep a sheet of paper next to wherever you take calls, or a note on your phone. Every call gets one line on why they called. Don't write down who. Write down what they wanted.

At the end of the week, group the lines. You're going to see the same few reasons over and over. Chances are the biggest piles are about your hours, your prices and how to get on the schedule. You'll also see your own trade's version of those, the questions you've answered so many times you could say them in your sleep.

Don't skip the odd ones. If three different people called in one week to ask if you deliver to the next town over, that's a question your website should be answering. Small repeats add up across a season.

Circle every reason where the answer is the same no matter who's asking. Those are the calls that don't need you. They need the answer to be somewhere the caller finds it before they dial.

The rest of the list still needs a human. Custom quotes, problems on a job and people who want to talk something through are the calls worth protecting your time for.



A three-step flow from WHY THEY CALL to ANSWER IT ONLINE to FEWER CALLS, showing repeat questions moved onto the website and a text reply.

Put the answers where callers look first

Take every circled reason from your sheet and put the answer in front of the caller before they pick up the phone. Start with your website and your Google Business Profile, since that's where people searching for you see your number. A lot of people make up their mind right there. According to BrightLocal's 2026 local consumer review survey, reading positive reviews is enough to get 20% of consumers to contact the business. BrightLocal sells local search software, so don't lean on the exact number. Still, your listing does some of your talking before the phone ever rings.

Hours go at the top, including when you don't answer the phone. If you're closed Sundays, say it. If you only take calls until six, say that too.

Price is the hard one, because every job is different. You don't need a full price list. Put up a starting price or a range, or just list what changes the price, like size, date and distance. A caller who sees what drives the quote shows up with the details you need, and the tire kickers drop off before they ever call.

Booking needs a clear next step, like a form or one line that says to text your date and address for a quote. Whatever you pick, make it the same on your website and your Google listing so nobody gets two different answers.

Fewer calls is the point. Every question a caller can answer on their own is a call that never interrupts your day and never gets missed.

A voicemail greeting and a text reply that buy you time

Some calls will still ring out. The job now is making sure a caller who reaches nobody doesn't feel like they reached nobody.

Start with your voicemail greeting, because most greetings say nothing useful. The caller wants to know they reached the right business and when they'll hear back. If there's a faster way to get an answer, like texting for a quote, put that in too. A version you can adapt:

You've reached (your business name). Everybody is out on a job right now. Calls get returned at noon and at four. For a quote, text this number your event date and address.

Swap in your business name and your real callback blocks. Then keep it current. If you're closed for a holiday or slammed for a busy stretch and calling back takes longer, change the greeting to say so. And only promise a time you'll hit, because a greeting that says four o'clock and a callback at nine that night is worse than no promise.

Then set up a text reply from your own phone. If your phone can send an automatic reply to missed calls, turn it on. If it can't, save the message as a note and send it by hand the minute you see the missed call. Keep it short and say the same thing the greeting says.

Keep that text about the call they just made. The FCC's consumer guide to robocalls and texts says commercial texts require written consent, while consent for informational texts may be oral. A reply about when you'll call someone back is a different thing from a promo blast, so don't turn your missed-call text into an ad. None of this is legal advice, and Chapter 12 has more on the rules.

These fixes do run out. Nobody can pick up while driving a delivery, and a callback block only helps if the caller is still waiting when it comes around. Voicemail only works for the callers who leave one. The rest of this book picks up from there.

Common Questions

What should a small business voicemail greeting say?

Tell callers they reached the right business and when you'll call back. Add a faster way to get an answer if you have one, like texting this number a date and address for a quote. Keep it short. Only promise callback times you'll keep, because a missed promise hurts more than a vague greeting. Then set your callback blocks so the greeting stays true.

Should I put my prices on my website if every job is a custom quote?

Yes, in some form. You don't need a full price list. A starting price or a range works, and so does a plain list of what changes the price, like size, date and distance. Callers who see what drives the quote come in with the details you need, and people shopping for the cheapest option sort themselves out before calling. Fewer surprise calls about price means fewer interruptions while you're working.

Is it better to answer business calls myself or let them go to voicemail?

Answer them yourself whenever you can do it safely. A caller who reaches a person who knows the business gets what they need fastest. In one of my videos I said it plainly: *"If you're around to pick up the phone, then do it. Pick up the phone. That's great. Everyone loves when humans pick up the phone."* Voicemail and a text reply are for the times you can't, and they work best with a callback time you keep.

Can I send an automatic text when I miss a call from a customer?

Often, yes, from your own phone. If your phone can auto-reply to missed calls, set a short message saying who you are and when you'll call back. If not, save the text and send it by hand. Keep it about the call they just made. The FCC's consumer guide says commercial texts require written consent, so a promo blast is a different thing. This isn't legal advice, and the rules can change.

How do I stop getting the same questions on the phone every day?

Write down why people call for one week, then put the repeat answers where callers look first. Hours, price ranges and how to book all go on your website and your Google Business Profile. A caller who finds the answer there never has to dial, and the calls that still come in are the ones that need you. Update those answers whenever your hours or prices change, or the calls will start again.

Chapter Reflection

Nothing in this chapter cost money, and every piece of it shrinks the pile of calls that need you. What it can't do is make you faster when you're on a job all afternoon, or bring back a caller who hung up without a word. If those callers matter to you, the callback stops being a chore you squeeze in at night. It needs rules of its own.

04

CHAPTER FOUR

Calling Back Before They Call Someone Else

If you're like a lot of owners, the callbacks happen last. At night, on the couch, scrolling through the missed calls and trying to remember which number was the person asking about next Saturday. A lot of them don't pick up. You leave a voicemail or two and call it a day.

Calling back is its own job, and it deserves better than the leftover ten minutes of your night. It has an order and a clock, and it works a lot better with a text in front of it.

Before I built anything for phones, I ran marketing for a group of eighteen car dealerships. The problem I walked into there looks a lot like the missed-call list on your phone tonight.

> *"So your new targets aren't actually new. You have to steal them from other brands and bring them back over, but you generally already own their email, phone number, and everything like that. What they didn't have was good processes for following up with those people efficiently and effectively."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON WORKING THE PEOPLE WHO ALREADY REACHED OUT

The clock starts when the ringing stops

Somebody who called you and got nobody is still shopping. They didn't stop needing a tent or a quote because you were busy. They're calling the next business, and every minute you wait is a minute somebody else might pick up.

How fast is fast enough? A lot of the speed research you'll see quoted comes from companies that sell sales software, so read it with that in mind. The 2007 InsideSales.com lead response study, done with an MIT researcher, reported that the odds of reaching a lead called within 5 minutes drop 100 times by the 30-minute mark. That study looked at web leads, and it's a vendor's own research. It's no promise about your phone.

The direction still matches what Chapter 1 laid out. Interest cools fast, and the first business to have a real conversation with the caller has the best shot at the job. You can't call everybody back in five minutes while you're on a job. You can make sure the calls that matter most get called first.

Sort the list before you dial

A missed-call list is a few lists mixed together, and calling them back in the order they came in wastes your best minutes on your least important calls.

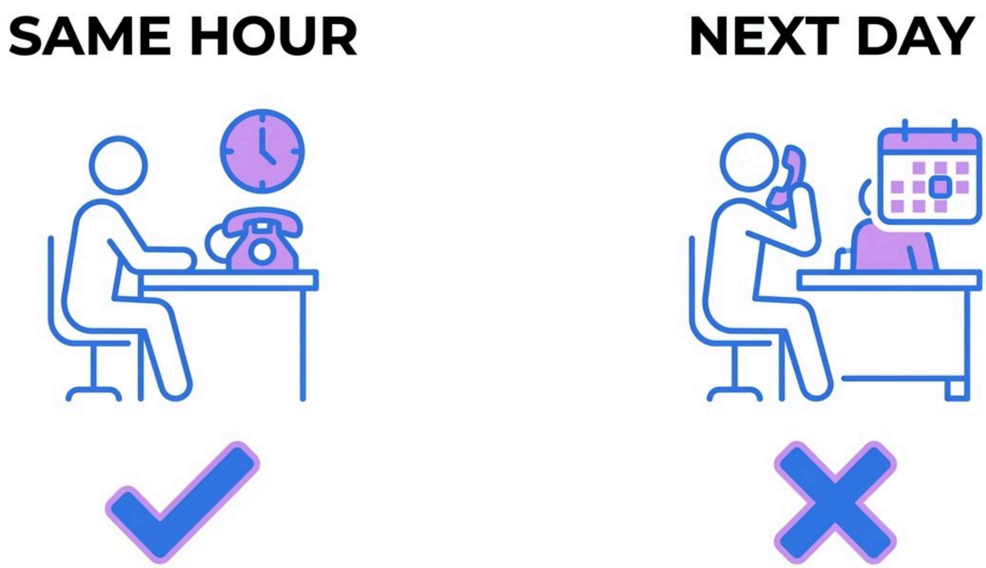
So sort them. The rule I'd use has three tiers, and you can move the lines to fit your business.

Call back at your very next break. This tier is anybody with a date coming up soon, any booked customer with a problem or a change, and anybody whose voicemail says today. Booked customers belong here even though the money is already in. Somebody throwing an event calls you again and again for the life of that event, and those calls protect a job you've already won.

Call back in your same-day callback block. New quote requests, general questions and numbers you don't recognize that left no message. Treat every one of them like a customer until you know otherwise, so they get a same-day callback with a text first.

Call back when you get to it, or don't. Vendors, sales pitches, the marketing company that calls every Tuesday. None of these should ever push a customer down the list.

Sorting only works if you know what each caller wanted. For the voicemails, you do. For the blank missed calls, the text in the next section is how you find out.



A two-column comparison of SAME HOUR and NEXT DAY callbacks, showing the caller still waiting in one column and already booked elsewhere in the other.

Text first so your number is not a stranger

Chapter 1 covered the Pew Research Center finding that most Americans don’t answer calls from numbers they don’t know. The same 2020 Pew survey found 67% say their general practice is to let an unknown number ring but check a voicemail if one is left. So a cold callback from your cell has a good chance of going nowhere, and a voicemail has a decent shot at being heard.

That points to a simple order. Text first, then call, then leave a voicemail if they don’t pick up.

The text tells them who’s about to call so your number stops being a stranger’s number. Something like this works:

Hi, this is (your name) with (your business). You called us a little while ago. Expect a call from this number in about 5 minutes. If texting is easier, just reply here.

Some people will reply and never need the call. Let them. A booked job over text counts the same as a booked job over the phone.

Then call. If they don’t answer, leave a short voicemail with your name, your business and when you’ll try again. Keep the text and the voicemail about the call they made. Chapter 3 covers why a reply to someone's call is a different thing from a marketing text.

Go back through last month's missed calls

Same lesson as the dealerships. The people most likely to buy from you already raised their hand and gave you their number. And most businesses never go back to them.

Your call history is that list. Scroll back through the last 30 days and find every number you never reached and never talked to. Send each one a short text. Say who you are, say they called a while back, and ask if they still need help with it.

Some will have booked someone else already. Some will have put it off and still need you. Either way it costs you a few minutes and no ad money, because these people already found you once.

Where calling back on your own runs out

Everything above is free, and for plenty of businesses it's enough. It runs out in a couple of places. You can only call back when you're off the job, so on a long day the whole list waits until evening. And a missed call with no voicemail is a blank line you can't sort, because you don't know if it was a customer with a date next week or a robocall.

So this is where I'll tell you about what I built. KaiCalls puts a secretary named Kai behind your business phone. On the smallest plan, Kai Backup, your cell rings first, so you still pick up everything you can. If you don't pick up, Kai answers, gets the caller's name and what they need, and texts you the details.

That fixes the two places the free version breaks. A caller you can't get to talks to Kai instead of listening to a ring. And every missed call on your list comes with a reason next to it, so you call back the important ones first and skip the rest.

If you want to see what that looks like on a real phone line, KaiCalls published an event rental case study from a tent and party rental company. It's the same family business from Chapter 2, my dad and uncle's, so read it as a family story and weigh it that way.

Kai Backup is $10 a month for about 20 calls answered by Kai, per KaiCalls' pricing page as of September 2026. Prices and plans change, so check that page for what's current before you decide anything.

Some businesses shouldn't buy it. If your business gets only a handful of calls a month, or you already pick up nearly every one, skip it. Use the free fixes from Chapter 3 and the callback order in this chapter, and keep your money.

Common Questions

How fast should a small business call back a missed call?

As fast as you can, and in order of what's at stake. Call back booked customers and anyone with a close date at your next break, and everyone else the same day. Speed matters. A 2011 Harvard Business Review study found firms that tried to reach a web lead within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to have a meaningful conversation as firms that waited even an hour longer. Those were web leads, so treat it as direction.

Why don't customers answer when I call them back?

Because to them you're an unknown number. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, eight-in-ten Americans say they don't generally answer their cellphone when an unknown number calls. Most of them do check voicemail. So send a short text first saying who you are and that you're about to call, then call, and leave a voicemail with your name and business if they don't pick up.

Should I text or call back a missed call first?

Text first, then call a few minutes later. The text tells the caller who's about to ring them, so your number isn't a stranger when it shows up. Some people will just reply and book over text, which is fine. Keep the message about the call they made, with no promotions, and leave a voicemail if the call after the text goes unanswered. A short voicemail gives them your name to match to the number.

What should I say when I call back someone who called my business?

Say your name and your business, mention that they called, and ask what they need. Then move them one step closer to booked, like a quote, a date or a site visit. When I was working with car dealerships, I put the idea this way: *"A lead expresses intent, but they do not necessarily buy. So what you have to do is walk them down that process."* A callback is the first step down that process.

Chapter Reflection

A missed call is still worth something an hour later, as long as somebody works it in the right order and the caller knows who's ringing them back. Sort the list, text before you dial, and go back through the calls you gave up on last month. Then there's the stretch of the day when nobody is working the list at all. So what happens to the calls that come in after everybody's gone home?

05

CHAPTER FIVE

After Hours, Weekends and the Busy Season

Years before KaiCalls, my father asked me to take over a telemedicine company he'd started, Rethink My Healthcare. It wasn't doing well. So I had to figure out who was going to buy it. A lot of the one-time doctor visits we ended up selling went to people coming in between midnight and three in the morning. Every doctor's office was closed. They wanted a second opinion, and they wanted it right then.

People buy when you're closed. Doctor visits then, tent rentals and service calls now. Your hours are printed on your website, and nobody planning a party reads them before they dial.

So this chapter is about the hours your business is shut and your phone number isn't: nights and weekends, plus the months when the work and the calls pile onto the same days. You'll decide what counts as urgent and what a caller hears when you can't pick up, then pick one of four kinds of coverage. And before you spend anything, you'll count your own after-hours calls.

> *"A lot of people call in after 5 o'clock, because that's when they get off of work. That's when they have time to do stuff. That's just what they do."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON WHEN CALLERS FIND THE TIME TO CALL

The calls that land after you lock up

Say it's 5:15 on a Tuesday. You're done for the day. You're driving home, or you're finally eating something that isn't from a gas station. The phone rings. Who picks up?

If nobody does, it goes to voicemail. And plenty of people won't leave one. They hang up and try the next company on the list.

The part that stings is you never see it happen. A missed call from a number you don't know looks like nothing at all, one line in your recent calls that you scroll past tomorrow morning.

Let me do some math for you. Say you get 20 calls a week, and 6 of them come in after you close or while you're out on a job. Say half of those 6 people hang up at the beep and book whoever answers first. Three jobs a week, gone, and you never heard a word about any of them. Run that across a busy month and it's 12 events somebody else is setting up.

You won't get an after-hours percentage from me. The numbers floating around online swing all over the place, and the only number that matters is yours. So you're going to count it, and it takes two weeks and zero dollars. More on that below.

Saturdays, setups and the busy season

Nights are one problem. Saturdays are a different one, because on a Saturday you aren't resting. You're working.

You met my dad and uncle's crew in Chapter 2. A Saturday is the same picture, only louder. Every hand is on a tent, and the phone is ringing in somebody's pocket.

Letting it ring is the right call. You can't hold up a tent and take down a rental order at the same time. On a Saturday you're one person standing on a stranger's lawn with a mallet.

The busy season makes it worse. When you're booked solid, it's usually because it's the time of year people throw parties, and that's the same stretch when people call to book one. So the calls and the work land on the same days. The phone rings the most exactly when you have the least time to pick it up. And the caller on the other end has no idea you're slammed. All they know is nobody answered.

So a missed Saturday call costs you the job, plus a caller who now figures you're too busy for them.

A phone lighting up on a dark kitchen counter at night beside a clipboard with the next day's delivery list.

Decide what counts as urgent before the phone rings

Not every after-hours call needs you. Most of them can wait till morning. A few can’t. The trick is deciding which is which on a slow Tuesday afternoon, and not at 10 at night with the phone buzzing on the nightstand.

Split your calls into two piles. Pile one is somebody whose event is today or tomorrow, with something going wrong. That call gets through to a person, every single time, and you decide right now whose phone that is. Pile two is everybody else. A quote for next month. A question about what you rent. Those get a callback, and the callback has a time on it.

This is what I tell every business we set up. You have to define what counts as an emergency and where those calls go. Nobody can decide that for you, not an answering service and not a piece of software.

Next, fix what the caller hears. After your business name, your voicemail greeting needs two things in plain words. Say you’re closed or out on a job, and say when you’ll call them back. The time is the part that matters. As soon as possible means nothing to a caller. By 9 tomorrow morning means something. Only promise a time you’ll beat. If you won’t be off the job till 6 on Saturday, don’t promise Saturday. Promise Sunday morning and call at 8.

When you do call back, expect voicemail on their end too, because people don't pick up numbers they don't know. According to Pew Research Center's 2020 survey on unknown callers, 67% of U.S. adults say they generally don't answer a call from an unknown number but do check the voicemail if one is left. So leave one. Say your name and your business, and say when you'll be free to talk.

Then write a weekend plan on one sheet of paper, with whose phone rings on Saturday, which calls get answered on the spot, where the details get written down and who calls people back by when. Text a picture of it to everyone working that weekend.

Last, count. Open your phone's call history or your carrier's online account and go back two weeks. Mark every call that came in outside your open hours, plus the weekend calls that came in while you were on a job. Then mark the ones that didn't leave a voicemail. That second number is how many people tried you after hours and walked.

Four ways to cover the hours you're closed

Once you have your count, you're picking from four kinds of coverage. Each one works for somebody, and each one breaks somewhere.

The first is voicemail with a real promise. It's free, and it holds up fine when your after-hours count is small and you keep every callback time. Busy season is where it falls apart, when Sunday's callback list is longer than your Sunday.

The second is a family member or somebody on the crew holding the phone. Also free, more or less, and fine for a weekend. By the fourth Saturday in a row they're carrying tables with your phone in their pocket, and they're sick of it.

The third is paying a person to cover it, your own hire or an answering service. That person hits the same limit from Chapter 2. One call at a time, so when two calls come in together one of them waits or hangs up.

The fourth is a secretary that picks up only when you don't, which is what we built KaiCalls to do. Kai doesn't get the first call. Your phone rings first. If nobody picks up, Kai picks up, and after hours you can route calls straight to him. He takes the call and texts you the details, or he rings you when it's one of your pile-one emergencies. KaiCalls lays out how Kai handles tent rental calls, down to the venue details and guest count he asks for.

The smallest plan, Kai Backup, is $10 a month per KaiCalls' pricing page as of September 2026, and your cell still rings first on it.

One of the tent rental companies we answer calls for had a busy season like the one above. They'd been trying to hire somebody for the phone and couldn't fill the spot. With Kai picking up, they didn't have to. They had to hire more people to put up tents, because they were that busy. If you want to see how an event rental business set that up, read the event rental case study, and know going in that the rental company in it is my family's business.

And if your two-week count shows two after-hours calls, and you called both of them back by 8 the next morning, keep your voicemail. You don't need any of this yet.

Common Questions

How should a small business handle after-hours calls?

Decide it in advance, in writing. Split calls into urgent ones, like a customer whose event is today, and everything else. Urgent calls go to a named person's phone. Everything else gets a voicemail greeting that says who they reached and exactly when you'll call back, and then you call back before that time. Count your after-hours calls for two weeks first, so you're fixing the real volume and not a guess.

Is an answering service worth it for weekend calls?

It depends on your count. If two weeks of call history show only a handful of weekend calls, a good voicemail and a fast callback cost nothing and work. If the count is high, paying someone can make sense, with one catch. A person, yours or a service's, can only be on one call at a time, so two callers at once still means one of them waits or hangs up.

What should an after-hours voicemail greeting say?

Keep it short. After your business name, tell the caller you're closed or out on a job, and give a specific time you'll call them back, like by 9 tomorrow morning. Skip as soon as possible, because it promises nothing. Only name a time you'll beat. If you have an emergency line for customers whose event is today, say so in one sentence and give them the number.

How do I know how many calls I get after hours?

Count them yourself for two weeks. Open your phone's call history or your carrier's online account, and mark every call that came in outside your open hours or on a weekend while you were working. Then mark which of those left no voicemail. Nobody else's statistic tells you this. Your own count shows how many people tried to reach you and moved on.

Chapter Reflection

Your front door has a closed sign on it. Your phone number doesn't. People are going to call at night and on Saturdays no matter what your hours say, because that's when they finally have time to plan anything.

So the only real decision is whether you pick what happens to those calls, with a two-week count in front of you, or let the voicemail beep pick for you. Pick on a slow afternoon and write it down.

Getting the call answered is only half of it, though. A call picked up at 9 at night still has to reach the order your crew loads in the morning, and the next chapter is about a call that got answered perfectly and changed nothing.

06

CHAPTER SIX

When the Call Is Answered but the Order Never Changes

Everything up to now has been about getting the phone picked up. This chapter is about the minute after you hang up. Because a call that gets answered and then goes nowhere is a missed call with extra steps.

Event customers don't call you once. They call to book, then they call back when the guest count goes up or when they want to move the start time. You hear from the same client for the whole life of their event. Every one of those calls changes something, and every change has to travel from whoever picked up to the order your crew loads the truck from.

Take one call where that trip didn't happen, at a rental business we answer calls for. A customer phoned about an order they had already placed and asked for a couple of extra items. Kai picked up, got the request right, was polite about it, and ended the call. Later I went back through that call.

> *"Problem is it said we're gonna have our team add a table and chairs, and now they need to know that they need to add a table and chairs to their order. So his system isn't fully hooked in to the whole thing, but it is what it is. I told him that's the next step."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON A PHONE REQUEST THAT NEVER REACHED THE BOOKING

The call went fine and the order stayed the same

Think about delivery day for that customer. They're sure it's handled. They heard it on the phone. Meanwhile the crew loads the truck off the order, and the order says exactly what it said last week. So the truck shows up short, and your crew is standing in a backyard explaining something they never heard about.

Nobody on that call did anything wrong. The phone did its part. The gap sat between the phone and the order, and nothing was built to carry the request across it.

And that gap is worse than a missed call in one way. A missed call loses a job you never had. A dropped change can sour a job you already booked, with a customer who was promised something out loud.

In a lot of small businesses, change requests travel by memory. Maybe a note makes it onto a sticky pad. Maybe it lives in a text to whoever's in the shop that day. It works fine till the week you're slammed, and then it's the first thing to go.

So this chapter covers what has to leave every call, where it goes, who confirms it back to the customer, and the promises nobody on your phone should make on their own. That last part includes software, ours too.

Five details every call has to hand off

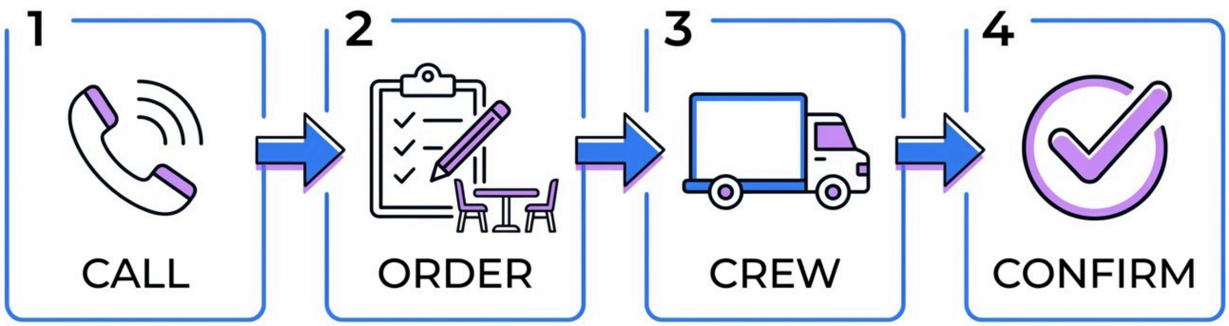
Whoever picks up, your nephew or a secretary, the call isn't finished until these five things are written down somewhere your crew will see them:

1. The caller's name, spelled the way they spell it.
2. A number that reaches them, which isn't always the one they called from.
3. The event date, and which order it belongs to if one already exists.
4. The delivery address.
5. What changed, in plain words: add, remove, move, or cancel, and how many.

Name, number, date, address, change. Tape the list next to the phone.

Now the free fix. Pick one place where every call's details land, and only one. Make it the order sheet itself, or a notebook by the phone that one person owns. Everybody who answers the phone writes there and nowhere else. Not a text to your spouse, not the back of a receipt on the dashboard.

Then a person reads that one place the same day, before tomorrow's trucks get loaded. Put a name on it. If it's you, it's you at 6 every evening, and you move each change onto the order yourself. A list that gets read tomorrow is a list that got read too late.



A four-step flow from CALL to ORDER to CREW to CONFIRM, showing an added table and chairs carried all the way to the delivery.

Who tells the customer it's done

A change is done when the customer hears it's done from the person who changed the order. Writing it down is only step one.

A caller might hear one of two sentences at the end of that call. One says the team will take care of it. The other says it's on your order for Saturday. The first is a promise somebody else has to keep. The second is a confirmation, and only the person holding the order can give it.

So the free fix has a second half. Whoever moves the change onto the order sends the customer one short message: what changed, and the date it's for. A text is fine. A quick call is fine. What matters is the customer hears it from somebody who looked at the order.

If you text customers from your business line, know the rules first. The wireless industry's messaging principles from CTIA, published in May 2023, expect a business to get a customer's consent before texting them and express written consent before any marketing text. They also expect you to honor it when somebody asks you to stop. CTIA treats marketing texts more strictly than other messages, and it still expects consent for both. Put one line in your greeting or your paperwork, and get a yes.

This isn't legal advice. If texting is a big part of how you run, get someone who does this for a living to look at your setup.

Promises nobody should make from the phone

The free fix runs out on your busiest days. The notebook only works if somebody writes in it. On a Saturday when every hand is on a tent, or at 9 at night when the phone rings in your pocket at dinner, the note doesn't get written. The call gets answered and the details stay in one person's memory.

Kai covers that gap. When he answers, he takes the caller's name, their number and what they need, asks the questions you told him to ask, and texts you the details after the call. If your Google Calendar is connected, he can book right into it using your live availability. If it isn't, he captures the request and you approve it later.

He only changes what he's hooked into. If your orders live in a system Kai isn't connected to, he can take the change and send it to you, and a person still has to put it on the order. That was the exact problem in the story at the top of this chapter. The phone half worked. The order half wasn't connected yet.

So whoever answers your phone, a person or a secretary, needs a short list of things they never say on their own:

- A crew or an item is available, until your company confirms it.
- A price you haven't written down for them.
- An arrival or delivery time nobody on your team has agreed to.
- That a change is made, when they can't make it themselves.

Kai runs on the same list. He won't promise a crew is available until your company says so. He won't quote a price unless you've loaded your pricing. If he doesn't know, he says so and takes the details. For a change he can't make himself, set his wording so he tells the caller he'll pass it to the team and the team will confirm it with them. Then your person-reads-it-the-same-day rule does the rest.

You can see how one ownership group runs the same intake across more than one rental brand in the multi-location tent rental case study, and one of the businesses in that group is my family's.

Common Questions

How do I make sure phone orders get added to my booking system?

Pick one place where every call's details land, like the order sheet or a single notebook by the phone, and have everyone who answers write there and nowhere else. Then put one named person in charge of reading it the same day and moving each change onto the order before trucks are loaded. If software answers your phone, check what it's connected to. It can only update the systems it's hooked into.

What information should I collect on every customer call?

Collect five things before the call ends: the caller's name, a number that reaches them, the event date and which order it belongs to, the delivery address, and exactly what changed, including quantities. Write them in the one place your crew checks. A call that ends without those five details is a call somebody has to make again, usually on the busiest day of your week.

Should whoever answers my phone give prices or delivery windows?

Only if you've written them down and approved them. Whoever picks up, a family member or a secretary, should never quote a price, confirm a crew or promise an arrival time on their own. The safe line is that they'll pass it to the team and the team will confirm it. A wrong answer said confidently on the phone costs more than a callback later that day.

Can I text customers to confirm an order change?

Yes, and it's one of the better ways to confirm a change, as long as the customer agreed to texts. Industry guidelines expect consent before texting and written consent for marketing texts. Business texting from a regular ten-digit number runs under the 10DLC standard, which gets registered through The Campaign Registry, so ask your phone provider whether your number is registered.

Chapter Reflection

An answered call is worth exactly as much as what makes it onto the order. Everything else is a nice conversation your crew never heard.

Start without software. Start with one place for every call's details and one person who reads it before the trucks roll. Then a confirmation goes back to the customer from someone who looked at the order. Add a secretary on top of that and he fills the hours you can't cover. Skip the one place, and every answered call is a coin flip on delivery day.

None of this tells you whether it's working, though. For that you need numbers you can see, and there are only five of them worth writing on the wall.

07

CHAPTER SEVEN

Your Calls, Counted Every Week

Back when I worked in marketing at Hyper, a company selling an influencer marketing analytics platform, there was a CFO who stayed on my case all day long. He wanted Excel sheets for the campaigns I ran, and I wouldn't build them, because I hated Excel. Before Hyper I'd never touched it, and it was frustrating every single time.

He didn't let it go. He made me stick with it. And to this day I tell everyone the same two words, twice in a row: Excel, pivot tables. Still use them all the time, too.

What that CFO gave me was a habit. When a business isn't bringing in what it should, you go find the leak, and you count until it shows up.

Your phone has a leak somewhere. This chapter is how you find it: five numbers on a whiteboard, updated once a week, pulled from places you already have. You'll also see what a real month of calls looks like in our own records, and what to check before you record a single call.

> *"Frankly, you're probably not tracking it. Most small business owners that I talk to aren't tracking their calls, transcripts, the outcomes from them properly."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON WHAT OWNERS COUNT AND WHAT THEY SKIP

The count in your gut is always low

Ask an owner how many calls they missed last week and you'll get an answer fast. A few. Not many. Maybe on Saturday.

That answer comes from memory, and memory only holds the calls that left a trace. A voicemail you listened to, you remember. A customer who got through on the second try, you remember. The person who called once from a number you didn't recognize, heard a ring and then a beep, and called the next guy? That call left nothing in your memory to count.

So the calls you feel are the ones that almost got away. The ones that fully got away don't register at all. Your gut undercounts the leak in exactly the spot that costs you the most.

What most owners do keep track of is the lead that made it in. Somebody booked, or somebody's name is on the calendar. The details of the call itself, what they asked for and what they were told, sit with whoever picked up. Nobody writes down the call that never turned into anything.

Counting fixes that, and it doesn't take a spreadsheet class.

Five numbers that fit on a whiteboard

Put a whiteboard where you'll walk past it. Draw five columns:

1. **Calls in.** Every call that rang your business number.
2. **Answered live.** A person picked up.
3. **Missed.** Nobody picked up.
4. **Called back.** How many of the missed ones you returned, and how many of those the same day.
5. **Booked.** Jobs that started with a phone call.

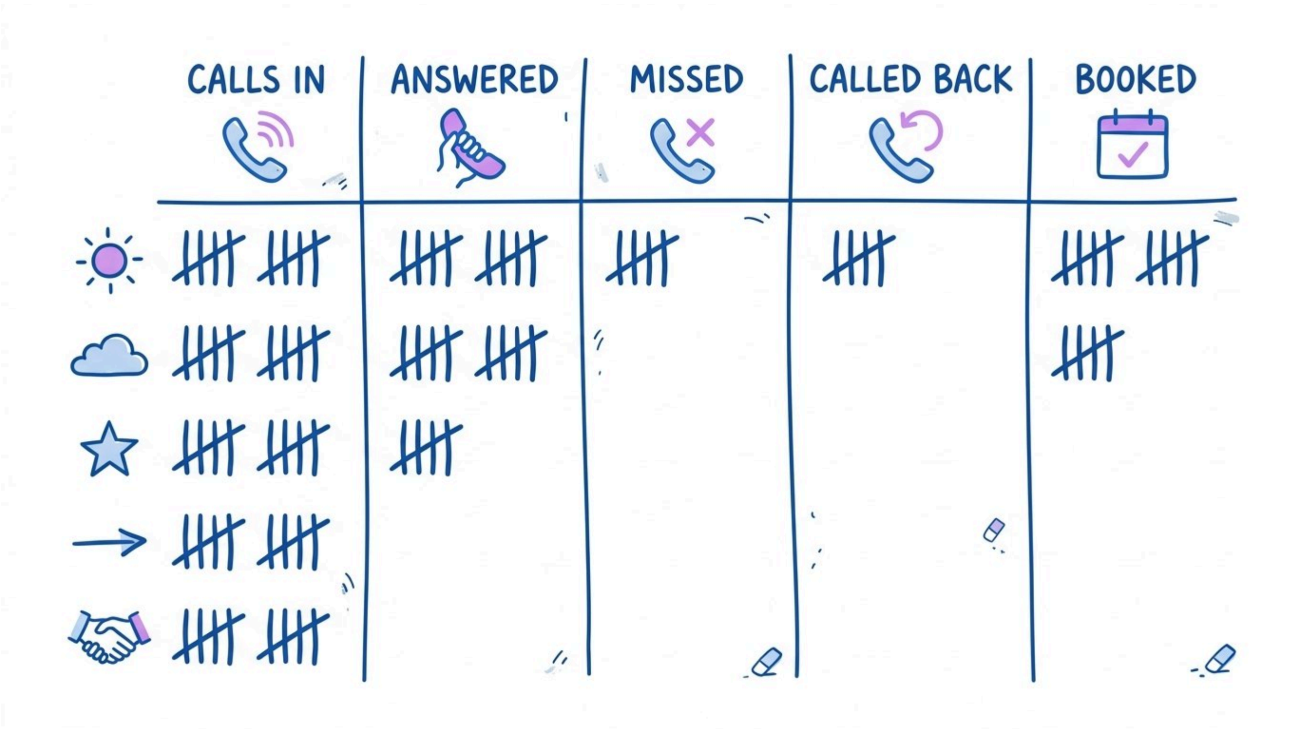
Let me run a week for you. Say you had 30 calls in, 19 answered live and 11 missed. Say you called back 7 of the 11, only 3 of them the same day, and you booked 9 jobs.

Now look at the board. Four people called your business and never heard back from anybody. Four more waited till the next day or later. And you'll never feel any of that in your gut, because none of those people left a mark you'd remember.

The board also tells you which chapter to go back to. A lot of missed calls during open hours points to the free fixes in Chapter 3. Slow callbacks point to Chapter 4. A pile of missed calls at night and on weekends points to Chapter 5. Plenty answered and not many booked usually means details are falling out between the phone and the order, which is Chapter 6.

One tweak is worth it. Split the missed column into two colors, one for open hours and one for after hours. The fix for each one is different.

Do it the same morning every week. Monday works. Ten minutes, and write last week's numbers right next to this week's. Count them the same way every week, ugly weeks included, so you can tell whether anything you changed did something.



A whiteboard tally with columns CALLS IN, ANSWERED, MISSED, CALLED BACK and BOOKED, filled in with tick marks for one week.

Where the counts come from without buying anything

You already own most of this data. It's just sitting in places you don't look.

Calls in and missed come from your phone's call history, or from your carrier's online account if you want the full list with times. Scroll back seven days and count. Your recent calls list already marks which ones you missed.

Called back comes from the same list. Look at your outgoing calls and match them to the numbers that called you.

Answered live and booked are the two your phone can't tell you, because the call log knows a call happened and has no idea what was said. So keep a tally sheet by the phone or on a clipboard in the truck. One tick when a person picks up. One tick when a call turns into a booking. It feels silly for about a week, and then it's habit.

Count your voicemails while you're at it. Missed calls minus voicemails is roughly how many people gave up without saying a word.

If you'd rather type it than draw it, a spreadsheet with one row per week and five columns is plenty. No pivot tables required. Sorry to my old CFO.

A month of calls from our own records

KaiCalls publishes its own count every month, and I'd be a hypocrite telling you to count if we didn't. According to KaiCalls' month-one ledger (September 2026), 9,434 calls had run through KaiCalls as of September 1, 2026. In August 2026, 690 calls hit the platform and 657 of them completed, per the same ledger. For the businesses using it that month, the average completed call ran 2 minutes 34 seconds, by the same ledger.

Two things in there matter for your whiteboard.

First, look at calls in against completed calls. Your board has the same shape, calls in against answered live. The gap between the two is the first thing worth asking questions about, whether it's our platform or your cell phone.

Second, look at how short a call is. Under three minutes, on average, for everything a customer needed to say. So the details of a call either get written down during those few minutes or they don't get written down. Later never comes.

When Kai answers your calls, a lot of the counting happens for you. Every call shows up in your call history with how long it ran, and with recording turned on, a transcript you can read once it's processed. That lets you test things you'd otherwise argue about. Maybe you take the calls during the middle of the day and Kai handles after hours. Maybe a different greeting books more people. Run it for a couple of weeks and read the count. The [KaiCalls setup docs](#) walk through routing, business hours and where notifications go.

One honest limit. Kai only counts the calls that reach him. If some customers still call your personal cell and you never forwarded it, those calls aren't in anybody's history but your phone's. Keep the tally sheet till every number your customers use is counted somewhere.

Recording calls without breaking a consent law

You don't need to record a single call to fill in the whiteboard. Recording helps when you want to hear what was said, and it comes with consent rules that change from state to state. Chapter 12 goes through them, including the states that want everyone on the call to agree.

The simple move that covers the most ground is telling every caller at the start that the call is recorded. Then you're not guessing which state they're calling from. None of this is legal advice.

On KaiCalls, a recording only exists when recording is turned on for the call and the required disclosure or consent is satisfied, per [the call records help page](#). If you run a business in a state with stricter rules, have a lawyer look at your greeting before you turn it on.

Common Questions

How do I track missed calls for my small business?

Use the call history you already have. Once a week, open your phone's recent calls or your carrier's online account, go back seven days, and count calls in and calls missed. Split the missed ones into open hours and after hours, and note which ones left no voicemail. Write the numbers on a whiteboard or one row of a spreadsheet, same day every week, so you can compare week to week.

Which call numbers should a small business owner check every week?

Five of them: calls in, calls answered live, calls missed, missed calls you returned (and how many the same day), and jobs booked from a call. Check them the same morning every week and write them next to last week's. The gaps between those columns show where the leak is, whether it's slow callbacks or details that never reach the order.

Do I need to record calls to track them?

No. The five numbers come from your call history and a tally sheet, and neither one needs a recording. Recording helps when you want to hear what a caller asked for or what they were told, like when a booking went wrong and nobody remembers why. If you do turn it on, say at the start of every call that it's recorded, and read Chapter 12 for the consent rules first.

How long does a typical business call last?

For businesses using KaiCalls in August 2026, the average completed call ran 2 minutes 34 seconds, according to KaiCalls' month-one ledger (September 2026). It's our platform's number, not a national figure, and your own calls may run longer or shorter. Your phone's call history shows each call's length, so you can check yours. Short calls mean the details have to get captured during the call, not after.

Chapter Reflection

A feeling about your phone is not a number. The feeling says you miss a few. The board says four people called last week and never heard from you, and it says it the same way every Monday.

Part One fits on that one whiteboard. Missed calls, slow callbacks, nights and Saturdays, answered calls that never reached the order. You can’t fix a column you’ve never filled in, and once you fill it in, next week’s number tells you whether the fix worked.

The phone is one place your hours go. Part Two follows the rest of them, starting with the work you still do by hand after the call ends.

08

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Hours You Spend Doing Everything by Hand

The first half of this book was about the call. This half is about everything that happens around it. The text you send to confirm a date. The reminder a couple of days out. The deposit you ask for twice. The answer about your hours that you typed out yesterday and will type out again tomorrow.

None of that work is hard. It just never stops, and it all comes out of the same account, which is your time. Small businesses can go up against much bigger companies now in ways they couldn't a few years ago. What they run out of is hours in the day.

This one I've lived on both sides of. When the tools changed, so did the math on what one person can carry.

> *"And I realized, holy crow, I can do so much more as a single person with systems than I could ever in my entire life. I have always been someone who's needed a team to do most of the marketing, and now I can do that for myself and across ten, fifteen businesses without necessarily putting in more time."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON ONE PERSON DOING A TEAM'S WORK

A week of work nobody sees

Start with your own week, before any software. Most owners can tell you roughly how many jobs they did last month. Ask how many hours went to the stuff around those jobs and you get a shrug.

So look at what fills the gaps between jobs: answering the same questions by text, confirming bookings and chasing deposits, sending reminders, and pulling the month's numbers together so you can tell whether you made any money. None of it shows up on an invoice. All of it shows up on your Sunday.

The free way to see it is a sheet of paper next to your phone for one normal week. Every time you do something that isn't the job itself and isn't a real conversation with a customer, write down what it was and about how many minutes it took. Don't fix anything yet. Just count.

Let me do some math with made-up round numbers. Say you answer the same pricing question 10 times a week, and each one takes 3 minutes by the time you find the right numbers and type them out. So one question costs you 30 minutes. Say confirmations and reminders take another 2 hours, and chasing a couple of late deposits takes 1 more. Add some posting and the month-end numbers and you land at 6 hours a week without trying.

Six hours a week comes to 300 hours over a 50-week year. It works out to seven and a half full 40-hour weeks spent on work nobody pays you for directly.

Your numbers will be different. Maybe it's two hours. Maybe it's twelve. The sheet is there so you're working from your number, because mine won't help you plan your week.

From needing a team to running it alone

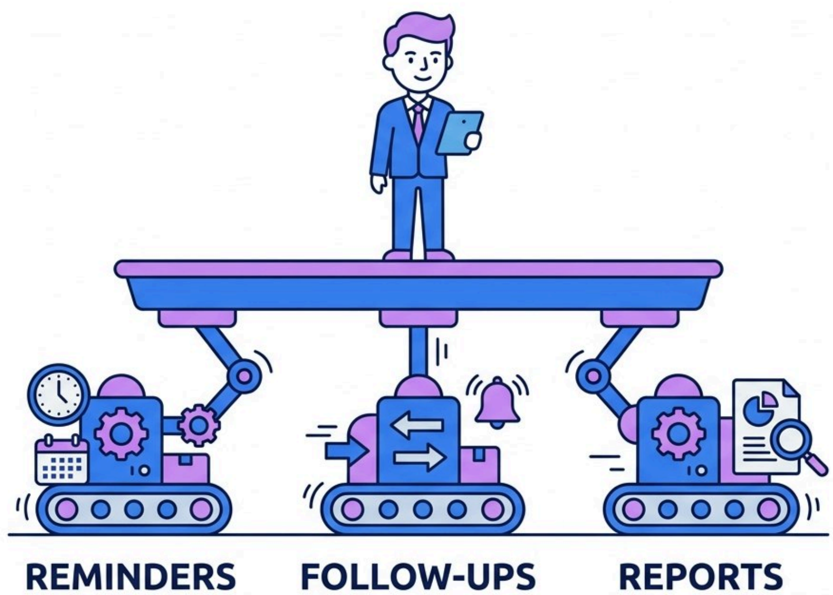
Most people are surprised when I tell them I run my business myself. Contractors come in when I need them. The repeat work runs on loops I set up that go every week, and if I put in about four hours a week, the business keeps running.

And that changes the hiring question. Why would I pay someone to fill four hours I don't need filled yet? When the business grows, the systems underneath me are already built to grow with it. That part is where a lot of people get stuck, because they grow before anything underneath them can carry it.

The loops I lean on hardest are boring ones: reports on my ads, search traffic and email, follow-up with new leads, outreach, and my favorite, a loop that finds errors and fixes them. Nothing on that list is exciting. Every item on it used to be an hour of somebody's week.

Not long ago, somebody tried to sign up for an app I thought was dead, one I had forgotten I even owned. The system underneath it was still doing its job without me looking. That is what working without working looks like when it goes right.

The same kind of loops now run for real businesses with real customers, my dad's tent company among them. One repeat job is enough for any of this to matter. You don't need a stack of businesses or a tech background. You need a week of work you can point at and say, this part happens the same way every time.



An owner standing on a platform held up by three small machines labeled REMINDERS, FOLLOW-UPS and REPORTS.

The small business AI numbers, side by side

So is everybody already doing this? No. And the answer you hear depends on who's asking and how.

According to the US Census Bureau's Business Trends and Outlook Survey, 19.8% of US businesses were using AI as of May 3, 2026. Among the smallest firms in that survey, the ones with four or fewer employees, it was less than 20%, according to the same Census report.

The National Federation of Independent Business asked small business owners the same kind of question and got 24%, according to its 2025 Small Business and Technology survey. And 75% of the owners in that survey who weren't using AI had no plans to start in the next 12 months, according to NFIB.

Then the Federal Reserve Banks' Small Business Credit Survey came back with 46% of employer firms reporting AI use, according to its 2026 report on employer firms.

Those numbers can all be right at once, because each survey asks a different question of different people. The Census Bureau asks the business whether it used AI in any business function, and it changed that wording in November 2025, so older Census figures run lower. NFIB surveyed 521 small employers. The Fed survey counts a firm if the business or any of its employees use AI, and its sample is made up of firms that chose to answer.

So if you're not using any of this yet, you're with most small firms by the strictest count. And if someone tells you every business around you has already automated, they're quoting the widest definition they could find.

Pricing an hour of your own time

Go back to the sheet. Take your weekly total and put a price on it. Use what an hour of your time earns when you're doing the paid work, or what you'd pay someone else to do those tasks, whichever you can defend.

Say it's 6 hours a week and you value an hour at $40, which puts the repeat work at $240 a week. Say you keep that up for a 50-week year, and it comes to $12,000 of your own time.

You'll never see that money on a bank statement. What the number gives you is a ceiling. It tells you the most that getting those hours back is worth, in money or in your own setup time.

Setup time is real, and people skip it when they talk about this stuff. The four hours a week I put in now came after a year of building those loops out. Some of what's on your sheet shouldn't be automated at all, and the next few chapters sort that out. Some of it doesn't need software either, only a better habit and a page of written steps.

And some of it is work you'd miss if it disappeared, because it's the part of the job where you talk to people. Keep a mark next to those lines. They matter in Chapter 11.

Common Questions

How many small businesses use AI right now?

It depends on who's counting, which is why the numbers you see land so far apart. The Census Bureau put it at 19.8% of US businesses as of May 2026, according to its Business Trends and Outlook Survey. NFIB got 24% from small employers in 2025, and the Federal Reserve Banks reported 46%, according to their 2026 survey, partly because that survey also counts employees using AI.

What should a small business owner automate first?

Automate the task you do the same way every week and would happily never do again. Track one normal week on paper first. Then pick the task that eats the most minutes and barely changes from one customer to the next, like confirmations or reminders. Leave anything that needs your judgment for later. Chapter 10 walks through writing the steps down before any tool touches them.

Is AI worth it for a one-person business?

It can be, and a one-person business is where I've felt it most. Most of my own repeat work runs on weekly loops, and I put in about four hours a week. It only pays off once the setup is done, though, and only for work that repeats. Price your weekly hours first so you know what getting them back is worth before you spend anything.

How do I figure out how much time I spend on repeat tasks?

Keep a sheet of paper by your phone for one normal week. Every time you do something that isn't the job or a real conversation with a customer, write down what it was and about how long it took. Add it up at the end of the week. Do it for a full week, not a day, because one slow Tuesday will lie to you about the rest.

Chapter Reflection

Time is the cost nobody writes down, so this chapter asked you to write it down. You have a number now, even a rough one, for the hours that go to the work around the work, and a price on those hours. Hold on to that sheet before you buy anything, since the next chapter is about owners who bought software first and counted later.

09

CHAPTER NINE

Why Automation Stalls in a Small Business

When automation dies in a small business, the owner usually did nothing dumb. The reasons are plain and built into how a small business runs. The information lives in too many places. The tools are a pain to use, so nobody opens them. Sometimes the automation works exactly as promised and breaks the part of the business sitting behind it. And even when all of it works, somebody still has to watch it.

So before you buy anything, it helps to know how this goes wrong. The most expensive version I've lived through was my own, at the telemedicine company from Chapter 5.

The ads finally started working, mostly on Facebook. The offer was about thirty bucks to see a therapist, and nobody argued with that. People came in, then they told their friends, and for a while the whole thing looked like it was finally clicking.

> *"Once we put that out, the problem was keeping the promise that we could service that. And that's why we ended up having to shut it down because the medical company that we were partnered with couldn't service it."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON AN OFFER THE BUSINESS COULDN'T KEEP

The front got faster than the back

What went wrong was underneath. The medical partner priced care as if most members would barely use it. Ours used it constantly. The more the marketing worked, the worse the math got behind it, until the whole setup stopped making sense and we closed it.

Nothing about the ads was broken. The front of the business got faster than the back could handle.

Automation can do the same thing to a small shop. Say you set up an automatic reply that confirms every date people ask about. The replies go out fine, fast and polite. The trouble shows up on the day itself, when there are more yeses on the calendar than hands to do the work.

So the first question for any automation is what it feeds into. If the next step after it is you, and you're already full, you just built a faster way to disappoint people. Look at the step right after the one you want to automate and ask whether it can take twice the traffic. If it can't, fix that step first, or leave the front alone.

Say you can handle four jobs on a busy Saturday. An automatic yes that books a sixth one moves the work to Friday night, when you're on the phone apologizing to somebody who thought they had a date locked in. Counting what the back can carry is free, and it's the first thing I'd do before switching on anything that says yes for you.

Your records live in too many places

A while back I worked with a company that wanted off the project software it had used for years. They'd heard AI can build anything. So the idea was simple: build our own. And I said yes.

Using AI to build all of it sounds great out of the gate. It looks easy at the start. Then you spend the first few months just moving data from one place to another, and nobody sees anything new on a screen for a long time.

And when the new screens finally showed up, they didn't work the way the old tool did. Over the years that team had customized the old software in lots of small ways, and those quirks were the part they liked. A clean new design stripped them out. Then came bug testing, which always takes longer than anyone plans for.

The data was the reason. There were spreadsheets and documents, forms, plugins somebody set up once and forgot, and accounts nobody remembered creating. All of it had to be found and tied into one place before a single thing could run on its own. Then the security had to go on top of that, which is its own project.

Your version is probably smaller and just as scattered. The date is in a text thread, the deposit is in the bank app, the special request is on a sticky note, and the price you quoted lives in your head. A tool can't automate a booking that exists in four places. It can only copy the mess faster.

A desk covered with order forms, a notebook, sticky notes and an open spreadsheet, each holding a different piece of one customer's booking.

Tools nobody wants to open

Most people like the idea of a system. They stop using it because it’s a pain to use. The record still has to live somewhere, though, and the hard part never changes: getting the information in correctly, then checking it later to make sure it stayed correct.

Say an owner buys a customer database, uses it hard for two weeks, and drifts back to texts and memory. The software didn’t fail. The owner didn’t fail either. Typing every call into a screen after a long day is a chore, and chores lose to sleep.

It isn’t only you. For small firms already using AI, the top challenges were accuracy, at 46%, and adapting the tools to fit how the business works, at 43%, according to the Federal Reserve Banks’ 2026 Small Business Credit Survey.

And plenty of owners haven’t gotten that far. In NFIB’s 2025 technology survey, 42% of small business owners said they were not at all familiar with AI tools built for business operations or their industry, according to NFIB.

The record also has to stay straight for months. Chapter 6 covered the event customer who calls back with change after change, and every one of those calls has to land in the same place, or the record is wrong by the time it matters.

So a new tool usually lands on scattered records and an owner learning the software at night. No software fixes that by being installed.

Somebody still has to watch it

Even when a system is built and running, somebody has to look at it. AI can help maintain software once it's built. It still needs someone with half a brain checking what it did.

Sometimes automation takes one chore off your plate and hands you smaller ones in its place: reading what it sent, fixing what it got wrong, noticing when it quietly stopped. If the software isn't core to how you make money, you probably don't need to build it at all.

The most expensive mistake is building before you know what you want. People start, get halfway through, and realize they didn't want it to look like that at all. And yes, I've been one of those people.

So rent before you build. Pay monthly for a tool that already exists, use it until you know exactly what you need it to do, and only then think about building your own. Anyways, in every one of these stories, knowing the steps turned out to be the hard part.

Common Questions

Why do small business automation projects fail?

Usually because the records are scattered and nobody wrote down how the work gets done. A new tool can't pull a clean booking out of text threads, sticky notes and memory. The other common failure is speeding up the front of the business, so more orders come in, when the people behind it can't handle more. Fix the records and the capacity before you add speed.

How long does it take to set up automation for a small business?

Longer than the sales page says, if you're moving everything into a new system. When I helped a company rebuild its project software, most of the early work was finding and connecting records. After that project I put it this way: *"Your first three months of trying this is probably just going to be data gathering."* A single repeat task on tools you already use is a much smaller job.

Should I build custom software for my small business?

Probably not, unless the software is core to how you make money. Rent a tool that already exists, use it until you know exactly what you need, and build only after that. Custom software also has to be maintained after it ships. AI can help with that now, but someone still has to check its work, and that someone is usually you.

Can AI run my business without me checking on it?

No. It can take real work off your plate, and most of my own repeat work runs on automated loops. Every one of those loops still needs someone looking at what it did, catching mistakes and fixing them. Plan on checking in every week, and more often while a system is new. The hours you get back come from doing less of the work yourself.

Chapter Reflection

Automation stalls in a small business for reasons that have nothing to do with how hard the owner works: records in four places, tools that are a chore, a front end that outruns the back, and nobody watching once it’s live. Buying a better tool doesn’t touch any of them. The fix that does costs about as much as a pad of paper, and it starts on the next page.

10

CHAPTER TEN

Write the Steps Down Before You Automate Anything

You can't automate a job you can't describe. Every tool, cheap or expensive, needs to be told the steps. If the steps only live in your head, the tool is guessing, and so is anybody you hire.

So this chapter is the free part. An index card and the tools already sitting on your phone. No new software until the steps are written down and you've watched them repeat.

Fair warning about who's giving you this advice.

> *"I'm really bad at SOPs and everything like that, but I am really good at turning a business into an absolutely automatable system. There's something about me that loves to turn everything into a conveyor belt and a factory line, and I am great at doing that because that's how businesses work."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON TURNING A BUSINESS INTO A CONVEYOR BELT

The index card test

An SOP is a standard operating procedure, a document that says how a job gets done. If you've ever tried writing them, you may have ended up with a binder nobody opens. Skip the binder.

Take one job you do every week and write its steps on a single index card. Then ask one question. Could somebody you hired yesterday do that job from the card, without calling you?

If the answer is no, the card is missing something. Whatever they'd have to call you about is the exact spot a tool would get wrong, because a tool can't call you either.

Try it on something small. Say a customer calls to move their date. Your card might say: find the booking, check the new date, update it, tell the customer. Hand that to someone new and they hit a wall on the second line. Check it where? Against what? What happens if the new date is already taken? Every one of those questions is a line you skipped because you do it without thinking.

Keep each line short and start it with a verb. Check the calendar. Send the quote. Take the deposit. A booking inquiry might come out as five or six lines on one card. Yours will use different words, and you should use yours, because you're the one who has to read it at the end of a long day.

The card forces you to cut the explaining and keep the steps. If a step needs a paragraph, it probably hides a decision, and you flag a decision instead of automating it. Put a star next to that line.

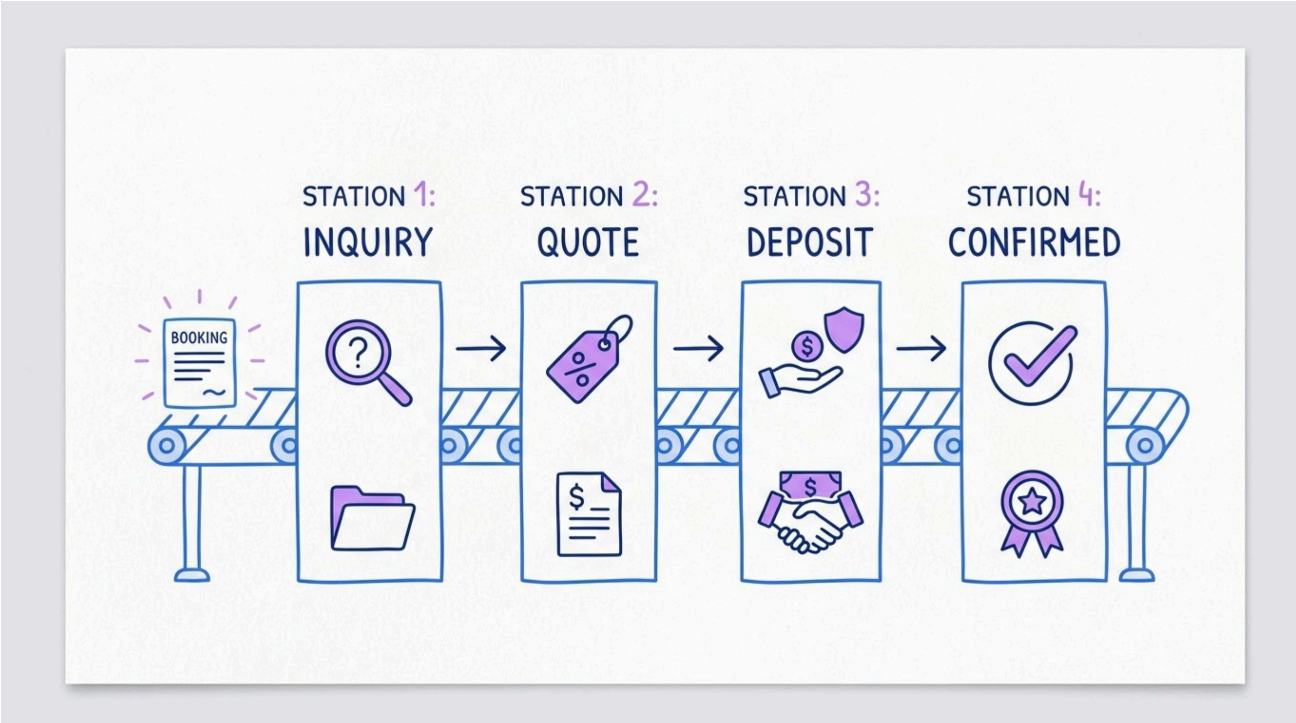
A conveyor belt on one sheet of paper

A lead goes down the line like a part in a shop. It comes in one end, moves through the same steps, and comes out the other end as a booked job or a no. Number come in, number go out. Nothing in the middle is mysterious once it's written down.

Most of what a business does repeats. The steps stay the same from customer to customer. What changes is the wording and the details, like the date, the address and what they want.

So once you have cards for a few jobs, lay them out on one sheet of paper in order, from the first call to the job being paid. Start with the calls themselves. Write down every reason people call you, and next to each one, the card that picks it up.

Now look where one card ends and the next one starts. Where the last step on one card doesn't hand off cleanly to the first step on the next, you found a leak. Maybe the quote goes out and nobody owns the follow-up. Maybe the deposit comes in and nothing tells you to confirm. Circle every leak. Those are the spots where money slips out quietly, and they're also the spots where automation fails first, because nobody told it what happens next.



A hand-drawn conveyor belt on paper moving a booking from INQUIRY to QUOTE to DEPOSIT to CONFIRMED.

Keep the tools you already open every day

The project software rebuild from Chapter 9 taught me the most boring lesson of all. Don't make a fancier screen. Copy how people already work. If they were used to working out of a shared spreadsheet, keep them in the spreadsheet and move the steps in around them.

Everybody wants to make something better. When you're changing how your own business runs, fight that urge. People will use a plain tool they already know long before they use a nice one they have to learn.

Same with customer databases. A CRM is a database of your customers and every conversation you've had with them, and it's only as good as what somebody types into it.

Your phone already does a lot of this. Most phones let you save a shortcut that expands into a full message you type all the time. Your calendar can remind you before a job. A spreadsheet can hold every booking on one row, with a column for each step on your card. None of it costs anything, and none of it needs a login you'll forget.

Owners who do use AI tend to start on the plain stuff too. In the NFIB 2025 Small Business and Technology survey, 29% of owners said they use or plan to use AI for communications like emails and documents, according to NFIB. Another 27% said marketing or advertising, and 9% said customer service, according to the same survey.

That lines up with what I'd tell you anyway. Use AI to help write the card or clean up a message you send every week. Leave the decisions with you.

One step that repeats every week

Look at your cards and circle the one step you did the most times last week, done the same way each time. That step is your first candidate. Pick it by count, even if something else on the cards annoys you more.

A step is ready to move to a tool when two things are true. It's written down, and it happens every week without you having to think about it. If either one is missing, it stays on the card.

Then run it by hand from the card for a couple of weeks. If you catch yourself skipping a step or adding one, fix the card before any software sees it. The card has to match what you do on a normal day.

Paper runs out eventually. When the same step happens so often that copying it off the card eats real hours, or when it needs to happen at 11 at night while you're asleep, a tool has earned its place. And when you get there, the card is the setup. You already know the steps, the order and where the leaks were. If the tool is Kai, the card becomes what you tell him to ask and do, and the KaiCalls setup docs show where each piece goes.

And move one step at a time. Hand one step to a tool, watch it for a couple of weeks, then pick the next one. If you move five at once and something goes wrong on a Saturday, you won't know which one broke, and you'll be finding out with a customer on the line.

Anything with a star next to it, the steps that need your judgment, stays yours for now. The next chapter is about those.

Common Questions

How do I start automating my small business for free?

Start on paper. Write one weekly job as steps on an index card, check whether someone new could follow it, then run it by hand for a couple of weeks. Saved text shortcuts and calendar reminders on your phone cover plenty of the early work. Skipping the writing makes everything after it harder: *"Because if you try and build without knowing your end system or SOPs, it's going to be a lot harder."*

Do I need a CRM for a small service business?

Not until you're using something consistently. A CRM is a customer database, and it only helps if every conversation goes into it. If a shared spreadsheet is where your bookings already live, stay there and get disciplined about it. After helping a company rebuild its software, the way I put it was blunt: *"If your problem is you don't use your CRM today, a new CRM will not make it better."*

How do I write down a process for my business?

Pick one job you did this week and write each step as a short line that starts with a verb, like check the calendar or send the quote. Keep it to one index card. Then hand the card to someone who has never done the job and watch where they get stuck. Every question they ask is a missing step. Add it, and try again until they can finish without asking you anything.

Is a spreadsheet good enough to run a small business?

For a lot of small businesses, yes, and often for longer than you'd expect. A spreadsheet everyone opens beats software nobody logs into. Move to a paid tool when the same step repeats so often that doing it by hand costs you real hours, or when it has to happen while you're asleep. When you do move, keep the columns and steps your people already know.

Chapter Reflection

Nothing in this chapter cost money. You have cards for the jobs that repeat, a sheet that shows where they leak, and a short list of steps that are ready for a tool. You also have a pile of stars. Whatever wouldn't fit on a card is probably a call you should be taking yourself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Where a Human Voice Still Wins the Job

Some calls you should take yourself, no matter who or what else could pick up. Knowing which ones is most of what makes automation safe to use on your phone line.

Back at the car dealerships from Chapter 4, we helped roll out buying a car online, right around the time Carvana was coming out. Click to buy. And people still wanted to test drive. They wanted to see the car in person before they handed over that kind of money. So the work turned into figuring out how to market and structure the business around the test drive, since buyers were going to ask for one anyway.

Your customers are built the same way on the calls that matter to them. Somebody spending real money on a day they only get once wants a person on the other end before they commit. And I say that as somebody who automated most of my own week.

> *“But you also wanna have fun with it, right? You want to connect with people, you wanna connect with your customers or at least feel like you’re doing something. At least I do.”*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON STAYING CLOSE TO CUSTOMERS

Calls to hand off and calls to keep

Every call that comes in fits one of two piles. The hand-off pile is information and logistics. The keep pile is money and feelings.

Hand off the calls where the answer is the same no matter who asks: your hours, directions, whether a date is open, taking down a name, a number and what they need, and reminders and confirmations. Nobody books you because you personally read them your hours, and every one of those calls pulls you off a job.

Keep the calls where a wrong answer costs you the job or the customer’s trust. Quotes on unusual jobs, complaints and price negotiations go here, and so does anybody who’s upset or nervous about their event. On those calls your voice is the product.

The keep pile also covers the small stuff people tell you along the way. A customer mentions it's their parents' anniversary, or that the grandmother coming needs to sit close to the house. That detail is the thing that makes their day a little more special, and it's the thing they'll remember you remembered. Whoever takes the call writes it into the booking, so that way the next time they call, you're the one who brings it up.

For a call you're not sure about, ask what happens if whoever answers gets it slightly wrong. If the worst case is a caller hearing your hours a little late, hand it off. If the worst case is a lost booking or a bad review, keep it.

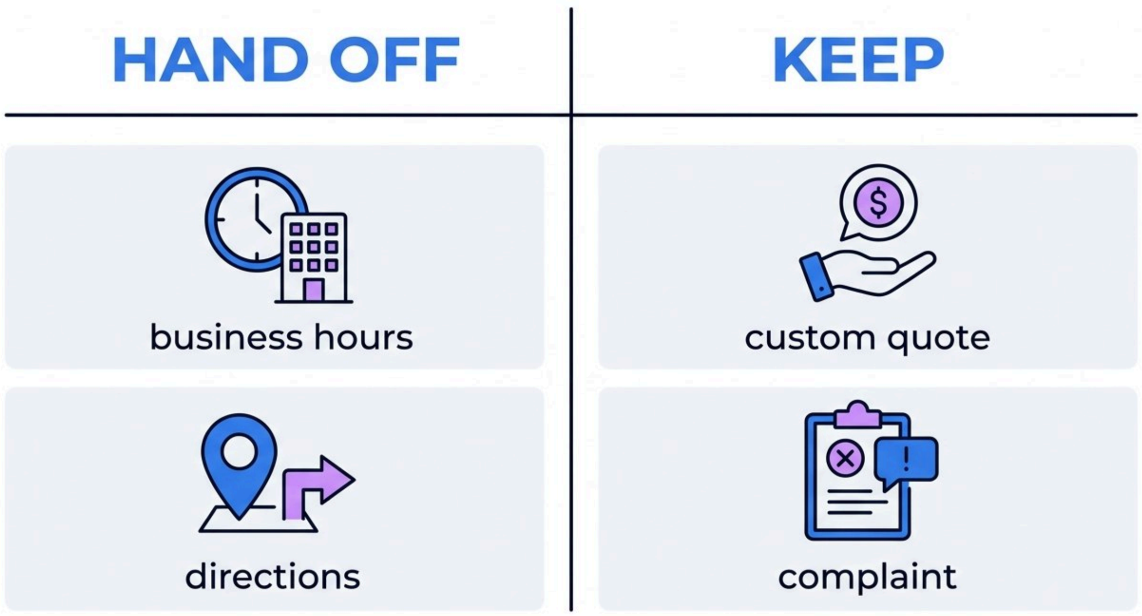
If you wrote cards in Chapter 10, you've already done half of this sort. The steps with a star next to them, the ones that needed your judgment, are keep calls. The steps without stars are your hand-off pile, and they're already written down, which is exactly what anyone or anything covering your phone needs from you.

Prices are a keep call unless they're written down

Prices deserve their own rule, because this is where handing off goes wrong fastest.

If a price is fixed and written down somewhere, whoever answers can give it. If a quote depends on the site, the date, the size of the job or anything you'd have to think about, nobody but you should say a number. The call ends with the details taken and a promise that you'll call back with the quote.

A made-up number on the phone helps nobody. If it's too low, you're stuck choosing between eating the difference and walking it back. If it's too high, they call somebody else and you never hear why. And if you're having trouble quoting consistently yourself, that's a sign the pricing needs to be written down before anyone else touches it, person or software.



A two-column chart with HAND OFF listing hours and directions and KEEP listing custom quotes and complaints.

Getting the right caller to you mid-job

The keep pile only works if those calls reach you while you're busy. Start with the free version.

Save your best repeat customers, and anyone with a booking coming up, as contacts on your phone and give them their own ringtone. When that ring goes off in the middle of a job, you know it's worth stopping for. Anybody who covers your phone for you, a partner or a family member, gets the keep list in writing, with one instruction: those callers hear that you'll call them back today, and then you do.

The free version breaks on strangers. A new customer has no ringtone. And a new customer with an unusual job is exactly the call you'd want to take.

It also breaks when you can't stop, ringtone or not. Some jobs don't let you put anything down for five minutes. When that happens, the promise matters more than the speed: the caller needs to hear when you'll call back, and then you need to call at that time.

This is where I'll tell you what we built, because it's the part the free version can't do. At KaiCalls, depending on the plan, your cell rings first and Kai picks up only when you don't. When a caller needs you, Kai can ring your cell and brief you on who's calling and why before he connects them, which KaiCalls' pricing page as of September 2026 calls a warm transfer with a whisper briefing. On a tent rental line, that briefing comes from what Kai collects from tent rental callers, like the venue and the guest count.

So you don't pick up cold. You pick up knowing it's a new customer asking about a wedding in June, and you decide in one ring whether to put down what you're holding.

For the calls you let go, the hand-off pile, Kai takes the details and you call back on your time. When recording and transcripts are turned on for your line, you can read the call record before you call back, so the customer doesn't have to explain everything twice.

Callers who know it's automated

You might worry that customers will hate talking to a machine. More of your callers have talked to one than a couple of years ago. About half of US adults now use AI chatbots, up from a third in 2024, according to Pew Research Center's June 2026 report on Americans and AI. And 38% of employed adults use chatbots for tasks at work, according to the same Pew report, so a good share of the people calling you probably type questions into one during their day.

So yes, customers probably will know it's automated. And I don't think most of them will care, as long as it gets them what they called for. What would bother anybody is being stuck with it on a call that needed a person, which is the whole reason for the keep pile.

And there are rules about what you have to tell callers, and about recording them, that change by state. Chapter 12 covers those, so don't set anything up based on this chapter alone.

Common Questions

Will customers be upset if an AI answers my business phone?

Most probably won't be, as long as it helps them. Callers will likely figure out it's automated, and I don't think most will care. People haven't stopped wanting to talk, though. After watching what people asked us for, the way I said it was simple: *"People like to call. People like to talk on the phone."* So keep the calls that need you, and hand off the rest.

Should an answering service give prices over the phone?

Only prices that are fixed and written down. If a quote depends on the site, the date, the size of the job or anything you'd have to think about, the call should end with the details taken and a promise that you'll call back with a number. A wrong price said out loud is hard to walk back, and it usually ends with you losing money or losing the job.

What calls should a business owner always take personally?

Take the calls where a wrong answer costs you the job or the customer's trust. That usually means quotes on unusual jobs, complaints, price negotiations and any caller who is upset or emotional about their event. Hand off the rest: hours, directions, whether a date is open, taking details, reminders and confirmations. Write both lists down so whoever covers your phone knows the difference.

Can an answering service transfer a call to my cell phone?

Some can, and it's worth asking exactly how before you sign up. The good version rings your cell, tells you who's calling and why, and only then connects the caller, so you're not picking up cold in the middle of a job. KaiCalls calls this a warm transfer with a whisper briefing. Whatever you use, test it by calling your own line from another phone.

Chapter Reflection

Automation earns its keep on the calls that don't need you, and it costs you work when it takes the ones that do. The two piles are the whole trick, and the free version of them is a ringtone and a list taped inside your truck. The next chapter lays out the rules for everything you hand off, but tonight the job is smaller: go through yesterday's calls and put each one in a pile.

CHAPTER TWELVE

12

Ground Rules for AI on Your Phone Line

Put software on your phone line and it starts talking to your customers in your name. So before it says a single word, you set the rules. Some of those rules come from regulators. The rest come from me getting it wrong on my own businesses first.

The regulators' part is shorter than people fear, and it lives on their own pages. The FCC has a ruling on AI voices in calls a business places, and consumer rules on texting. A press-freedom group keeps a plain guide to which states need everyone's permission before a call gets recorded. You'll get all of it in this chapter, with the sources named so you can read them yourself instead of taking my word for it.

The other part is mine, and it's about mistakes. The ones that cost me came from software that said something wrong with my name attached, and from software that sent things nobody had looked at. You can fix both with rules that fit on one page.

One warning before any of it. None of this is legal advice. Rules differ by state and they change, so check the rules for your state before you turn anything on, and talk to a lawyer if your callers come from more than one state.

> *"Code is super easy to roll back. Code, you can always hit undo. I have sent so many emails that it should not have sent because my agent mistype something, said something dumb and it just hits send. Because there is no approval gate."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON AUTOMATION THAT SENT THINGS NOBODY APPROVED

Emails that went out without my say-so

A draft folder only protects you if the software has to stop there. Mine didn't have to, and emails with the wrong words in them went straight to real people. So I stopped hoping the software would write better and took the last button away from it.

Now every system I run follows one rule. The software can do a bunch of the work on its own. It can write the copy, build the ad, stage it and line up the post. What it can never do alone is publish, spend or send. Those buttons wait for me.

The approval also has to be for one specific thing. Telling software it can run ads is a blank check. If it uploads something off-brand next Tuesday, you signed for that. Telling it to run this ad, the one sitting in front of you, is a different kind of yes. Anything that shows up without its own yes is a mistake you can catch, because nobody approved it.

Some jobs earn more room over time. On my ads, the software doesn't get to switch a campaign on by itself until it has shown it can do the job right, over and over. Until it gets there, it asks every time. When I mailed postcards to businesses this summer, the same rule held, and nothing went in the mail until I had looked at the card itself. Chapter 14 tells the rest of that one.

On a phone line, the send button is anything that reaches a customer without you: a text to a caller, a follow-up email, a booking confirmation, a callback your system dials by itself. Write those down, and next to each one write whether it goes out alone or waits for you.

Tell callers it is automated and ask before you record

Start with recording, because it has the clearest rules. Federal law requires the consent of at least one person on a call before it gets recorded, according to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press in its recording guide for reporters. About 11 states primarily require everyone's consent: California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan (in some situations), Montana, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Washington. Connecticut and Nevada require everyone's consent for phone calls too.

Your callers don't stay inside your state lines. When a call crosses them, the guide's advice is to assume the stricter state's law applies. And the guide is written for journalists, which is one more reason to check your own state's rules before you lean on it.

So the free fix is one sentence at the top of your greeting: this call may be recorded. Say it on every call, to every caller, and you never have to work out who was calling from where.

Now the automated part. The FCC ruling in the next section covers calls a business places. For calls your customers place to you, tell them anyway. The Federal Trade Commission said it plainly in its 2024 announcement on deceptive AI claims: there is no AI exemption from the laws already on the books, and getting caught pretending software is a person is a bad way to lose a customer. Give it a name if you want. Just don't have it claim to be a human.

A three-step flow from DRAFT to OWNER APPROVES to SENT, with the message stopped at the approval checkpoint.

Texting and outbound calls need consent first

The big AI ruling is about dialing out. In FCC Declaratory Ruling 24-17, released February 8, 2024, the Federal Communications Commission said AI-generated voices count as artificial voices under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act. So a business that calls someone with an AI voice needs that person's prior express consent first, and prior express written consent if the call advertises or sells. Software that answers calls people make to you isn't what that ruling is about.

So my rule is stricter than the law and easier to follow. Never cold-call anyone with an AI voice. Not a list you bought, and not old leads who never asked to hear from you. If a person didn't ask you to call, a human calls, or nobody does.

Texting has its own rules. The FCC's consumer guide on robocalls and robotexts, last reviewed February 27, 2026, says commercial texts require written consent, and for informational texts consent may be oral. It also says people can opt out in any reasonable way, even after they said yes. The CTIA messaging principles from Chapter 6 (2023) add one more piece: a way for people to take their consent back.

Then there's registration. Texting from a regular 10-digit business number runs on a system called 10DLC, which The Campaign Registry describes as the sanctioned standard for business texting from a 10-digit number. Your texting provider registers your business and the kind of messages you send. If you text customers from an app and nobody ever asked you about registration, ask the app.

The free fix costs nothing. Put a checkbox on your web form where the person agrees to get texts from you, and save a copy of that wording. Then make STOP work the first time someone sends it. Whether a given text counts as marketing or information is a question for your lawyer, and it's a better question to ask before the first text than after a complaint.

Let it say it doesn't know

The worst thing an automated line can do is sound sure and be wrong. Going quiet is annoying. Telling a caller the wrong price, or telling one customer something about a different customer, is how you lose the job and your name with it.

You can set this rule today without buying anything. Make a list of the things your line never guesses about: price, whether a date is open, when someone will show up, and anything about safety. Anyone or anything that answers your phone gets the same instruction for each one. Take the details, and promise a callback by a set time.

A list works for a person who reads it. Software needs the rule built in, and that was the whole problem when I built caller memory into Kai. Every fact he keeps about a caller carries a confidence marker, and he only speaks the confirmed ones. If he can't confirm who's calling, he doesn't guess. He treats that person like a first-time caller. Anything ambiguous or in conflict, he leaves unsaid, because being wrong costs more than saying nothing.

And keep the old version of anything you change. In that same memory system, nothing gets silently rewritten. When a customer corrects Kai, the old fact gets marked outdated and the correction takes its place, so there's a trail of what changed. Do the same with your greeting and your call instructions. Save the version that worked before you edit it, so a bad change is one step back instead of an afternoon of guessing what you had.

Call your own line before a customer does

Before caller memory touched a real phone line, it went through a review whose only job was to break it. Other AI programs went after it. The review found six problems, and after we fixed all six, it ran again. Then more programs played the other side of the call, trying to trick it into giving up information it shouldn't.

Skip the review team. A second phone and twenty minutes will do. Call your own line and try to break it:

- Ask for a price you never gave it.
- Ask it to confirm a date that's already booked.
- Ask something personal about another customer.
- Call after hours and listen to what happens.

Write down what it said. Fix what was wrong, then call again. Keep going until the answers are boring.

If you put Kai on the line, most of these rules become settings you control instead of habits you have to remember. Recording is a setting you turn on, with a disclosure line, and KaiCalls' help page on calls says a recording only happens when the required disclosure or consent is satisfied. Kai doesn't quote prices unless you've put your pricing into his business profile. Before any text or outbound call goes out, the system checks consent first, and the KaiCalls trust center spells out how that works, along with the certifications KaiCalls doesn't claim. Read it before you turn texting on. Then call the line yourself anyway.

Common Questions

Is it legal to use AI to answer my business phone?

The FCC's 2024 ruling on AI voices, FCC 24-17, covers calls a business places and requires the called person's consent first. Answering calls people make to you isn't what that ruling addresses. Recording and texting still have their own rules, and some states require everyone on a call to agree before it gets recorded. None of this is legal advice, so check your state's rules and ask a lawyer before you go live.

Do I have to tell callers the call is being recorded?

It depends on where you and the caller are. Federal law requires one person's consent, and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press lists about 11 states that primarily require everyone's consent, plus Connecticut and Nevada for phone calls. When a call crosses state lines, that guide says to assume the stricter law applies. The simplest habit is saying the call may be recorded at the start of every call.

Can I send automatic texts to people who call my business?

Only with consent, and the kind of consent depends on the text. The FCC's consumer guide says commercial texts require written consent, while consent for informational texts may be oral. CTIA's 2023 messaging principles ask for express written consent for marketing and an easy way to opt out. Register your number for business texting through your provider, and make STOP work the first time someone sends it.

What should an automated phone line never guess about?

Price, open dates, arrival times and anything about safety. For each one, the line should take the details and promise a callback by a set time. As I said in a recorded Q&A on exactly this: *"It is better to say I don't know than it is to say a wrong answer."* A callback is easy to forgive. A wrong price is hard to take back, and a caller remembers it.

Chapter Reflection

Every rule here keeps something wrong from reaching a customer before you've seen it, and keeps a way back when something slips through anyway. Rules protect the line. They can't tell you whether the line is earning its keep. That takes a count, before and after, which is where Chapter 13 picks up.

13

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Proof the Automation Paid for Itself

Every tool you add promises to save you time. Some do. Some save you an hour on Tuesday and cost you two on Friday cleaning up after them. You won't know which kind you bought by how it feels. You'll know by counting, before and after, the same way both times.

Chapter 7 gave you a weekly count for your calls. This chapter does the same job for anything automated you add from Part Two, like a text reply, a booking link or a secretary on the line. You'll write down what it gives back and what it takes to keep it running. Then you'll be honest about the difference, even when the difference is zero.

The honest part is the hard part. Nobody likes writing down that something they paid for, or gave up weekends to set up, didn't work. So let me go first, with something of mine that doesn't.

> *"You'll notice that my long form videos absolutely bomb. I know that. Been working on it, trying to figure it out, but I test, I test, I test, I test. I look at the retention."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON TESTING HIS OWN WORK INSTEAD OF GUESSING

My videos bomb and the numbers told me first

Nobody had to sit me down and break the news. The numbers did it. You can post for months on a feeling that things are going fine, and the numbers will tell you otherwise the minute you open them. So opening them is part of the job, every day, good news or bad.

The same numbers told me something less fun. People like the videos I film in my backyard better than the ones I film indoors. So I should be filming outside. The catch is that I read from a screen, and a screen is harder to set up out there, so for now I film inside and know what it costs me. Knowing makes it a choice. Not knowing would make it a mistake.

Short videos went the other way. It took me something like three hundred posts to find a short format that holds people, and the only reason I found it is that I kept counting after every one.

Most of those posts lost. The count is how I found the ones that didn't.

When I set up systems for my dad's tent company and for my own businesses, the last step is always the same: measure what comes out. A system nobody measures is a guess that happens to be running.

A before-and-after scorecard for one change

Change one thing at a time. If you add a text reply and a booking link in the same week, and bookings go up, you won't know which one did it. You might keep paying for the one that did nothing.

Before you turn the change on, write down the before. Use the same number of weeks for the after, and the same source both times, like your carrier's call log. Then track these lines:

- Hours a week you spend on the job the change is supposed to take over
- Calls answered that used to go to voicemail
- Missed calls you called back the same day
- Bookings that came from those calls
- Mistakes the change made that you caught

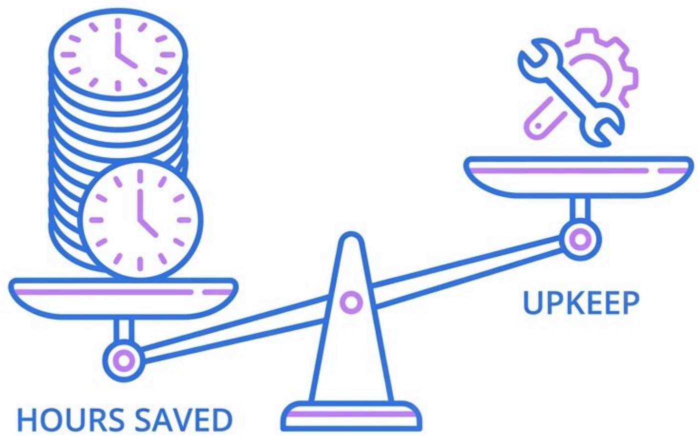
Now let me do the math out loud. Say the change is a text that goes out when you miss a call. Before, you missed 20 calls a week and called back 8 of them the same day. Four weeks after, you still miss 20 a week, but now you call back 14 of them the same day, and two more of those turn into bookings each week. Setup took you two hours. Checking on it takes ten minutes a week. That one paid for itself.

Say instead that bookings didn't move at all. Write that down too. The change might still be worth keeping if it gives you hours back, and it might not. You still make the call. The scorecard keeps you honest about it.

And the decision doesn't have to be keep it or kill it. If the change pulls its weight at night and does nothing during the day, keep it for nights and take the daytime back. Coverage can move around as the numbers come in.

When a line refuses to move, that line tells you where the leak is. Calls answered went up and bookings stayed flat? The leak is after the call. Either the details never made it onto the order (Chapter 6) or the callback came too late (Chapter 4). Hours went down and mistakes went up? The tool is doing the job fast and badly, and you're paying for it in callbacks and apologies.

Then weigh the side owners skip, which is upkeep. Every system needs somebody looking at it. Count the minutes you spend checking the tool and fixing what it got wrong. AI can take work off your plate and still hand you a pile of new little jobs in return. When the upkeep weighs more than what the change saved, turn it off. Call that a win. You found out for the price of a month.



A balance scale with HOURS SAVED on one side and UPKEEP on the other, tipping toward the side that shows the change paid off.

Call your own business like a customer would

The best way to check a phone setup is to be the customer. When researchers wanted to know how fast companies responded to new leads, they didn't survey the companies. They sent test leads to 2,241 U.S. companies and timed the replies, in what became Harvard Business Review's 2011 test-lead audit. Those were web-form leads at mostly larger firms, and one of the authors ran a sales-software company, so don't borrow their numbers for your phone. Borrow the method.

Get a phone that isn't yours. Call your business at the hour you're busiest, when you're out on a job. Call again after hours. Each time, write down four things: how many rings before anyone or anything picked up, what the caller heard, whether the details reached you, and how long it took you to find out about the call.

Do it before the change and again after it, at the same hour on the same day of the week. If you can't stand listening to it, have a friend make the calls and tell you what happened. The first mystery call tends to be humbling. Humbling is the point.

Two numbers that only look comparable

Numbers only compare when they were counted the same way. The U.S. Census Bureau flagged exactly this in its own survey of businesses. In November 2025 it changed the wording of its AI question, from asking whether a business used AI in producing goods or services to asking whether it used AI in any business function. So a rate from before that change and a rate from after it answer two different questions, even though they come from the same survey.

Your version of that problem shows up the day you switch tools. Your carrier's log counts a missed call one way. A new system might count the same call as answered, or not count it at all. So pick one source for the before and the after. If you have to switch sources, run both side by side for two weeks and see how far apart they land before you compare anything.

Chapter 7 mentioned that KaiCalls publishes its call count every month. The part worth copying is the fine print. The working file behind KaiCalls' month-one ledger (September 2026) spells out the date window, says that demo and test accounts were left out, and names one thing we didn't claim because no clean record existed for it. Hold your own scorecard to that standard, even if nobody but you ever reads it.

If you run a secretary on your line, the call records are one place those counts can come from, since every call leaves a record you can go back and read. Before you plan on the counts landing anywhere else, check the KaiCalls integrations page against the calendar and CRM you already run, and only count on what connects today.

Common Questions

How do I know if automation is saving my business time?

Count the hours before and after, over the same number of weeks, from the same source. Write the before down first, because memory rounds in the tool's favor. Then subtract upkeep, meaning the minutes you spend checking the tool and fixing what it got wrong. If the hours saved beat the upkeep, it's working. If they don't, turn it off and treat that as a useful answer.

How do I test my own business phone line like a customer?

Call it from a phone that isn't yours, at your busiest hour and again after hours. Write down how many rings it took, what you heard, whether the details reached you and how long it took you to find out. Repeat the same calls after any change, at the same hour and on the same day. If listening is painful, have a friend call and report back.

What should I measure after adding an answering service?

Measure calls answered that used to be missed, same-day callbacks, bookings from those calls and mistakes you caught. Where recordings are turned on, you can test more than counts. As I put it in one of my product videos: *"You can test what openings work. You can test, hey, maybe Kai doesn't do that well during the middle of the day, and you take the calls and then Kai handles your after hours."*

How long should I test a new system before deciding?

Give it a few weeks, and compare it against the same days of the week and the same hours as your before count. After-hours calls, follow-ups and the quality of your leads usually show up within the first few weeks. Don't judge it on day two, and don't let it run for six months with nobody counting either. Pick an end date the day you turn it on.

Chapter Reflection

Proof lives on one sheet of paper with two columns, before and after, in your own handwriting. Some of what you try will lose, and the losses go on the same sheet as the wins. Chapter 14 turns everything in this book into a week of work, and the very first job on Monday is a count.

14

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

What to Do This Week, in Order

This is the short chapter. Thirteen chapters of reasons, and now one week of doing. Every item below fits in a day around your real work, and every item points back to the chapter that explains it. So if you skipped straight here, you can still start Monday and read the why later.

The order matters more than any single item. You count before you fix, so you can tell whether the fix did anything, and you use up the free fixes before you pay for anything. Anything automated gets your sign-off and a trial run on a few people before it touches everyone. A postcard campaign I ran this summer followed that order, and it's the model for the whole week.

> *"Once I had approved on that, then it was allowed to actually send, but not until that moment. So then we tested it with a small batch of 20 to 30 postcards, or like 30 postcards, I think, and once I knew that it worked end to end, then I sent out the next 100 batch."*
>
> — CONNOR GALLIC, ON TESTING SMALL BEFORE SENDING TO EVERYONE

Approve the card, then mail a small batch

The campaign was simple to describe and fussy to run. Software went through Google reviews looking for businesses with bad reviews about missed calls, pulled together their mailing addresses and hooked into a postcard-mailing service. Most of it ran from my phone.

What the software couldn't do was mail anything on its own. It had to show me the finished postcard and the list of who it was going to, and then it waited. After the first small run, it set itself a reminder about a week out to check on delivery. Every card carried a QR code with a tracking link, so we could see whether any visits came from it instead of guessing.

Now it's a repeatable job. One message telling the system to go send postcards runs the same steps again, including the part where it stops and waits for me.

The same goes for anything you set up this week. Say you turn on a text reply for missed calls. Let it go out to the first ten people who call, then open your phone's sent messages and read every one. Check that none of them went to your supplier or your mom. Then let it run.

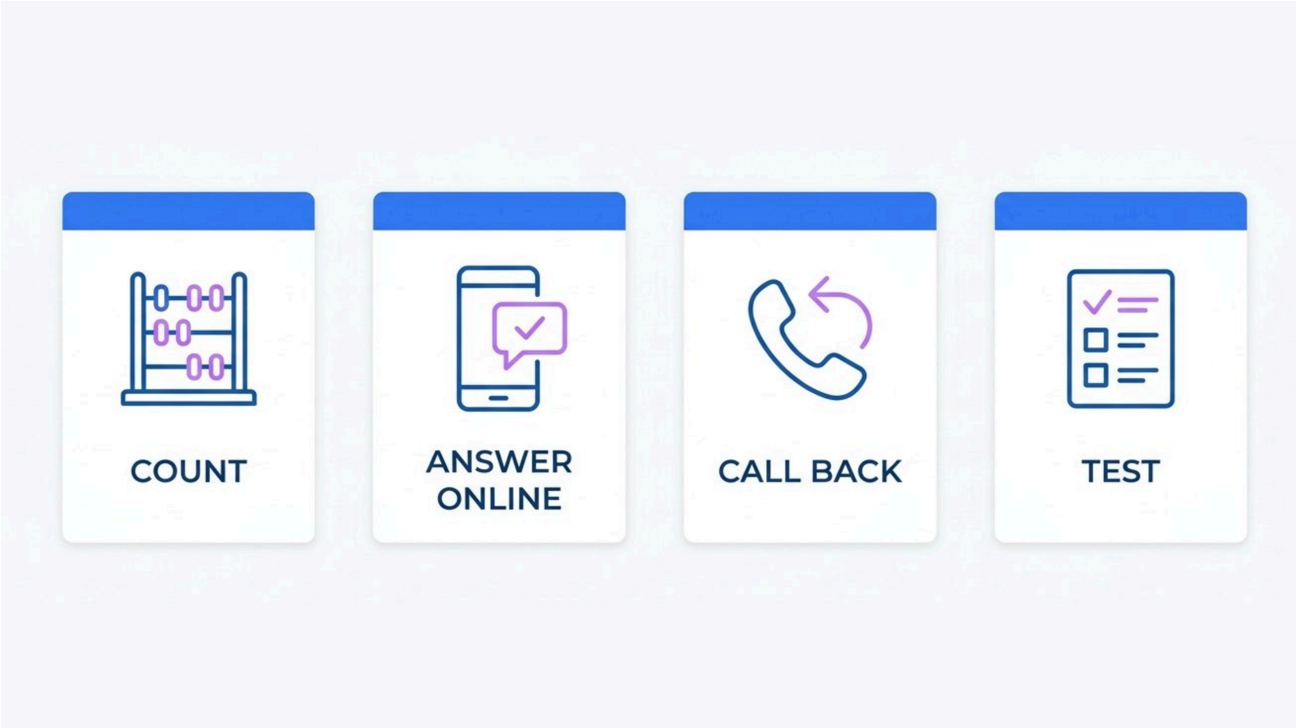
Use that shape for every item below. Do it once, small. Check that it worked. Then do the rest. And if something on the list goes badly, you find out on a Tuesday with one task at stake, instead of a month later with everything tangled together.

Monday to Wednesday with the phone you already have

Monday: count last week's calls. Pull your carrier's call log for last week and write down four numbers: calls in, answered, missed and called back (Chapter 7). Then put a price on the missed ones with your own numbers. Say you missed 10 calls, you'd normally book about 1 in 4 of the people who call, and you have a rough average for what a job brings in. Missed calls, times how many you'd book, times that average job, is your number for the week (Chapter 1). Keep the sheet. You'll need it next Monday.

Tuesday: write down why people call. Go through last week's calls and voicemails and list every reason someone called. Most of the list will be the same few questions, asked by different people. Put the answers to the top ones, like your hours, your price ranges and how to book, on your website and your Google listing (Chapter 3). Every question you answer there is a call you don't have to take while you're on a job.

Wednesday: rerecord your voicemail and set a text reply. Record a greeting that tells callers when they'll hear back, and pick a time you can keep (Chapter 3). Set a text reply on your phone for calls you miss, and decide what an after-hours caller should hear and who, if anyone, calls them back that night (Chapter 5). Before anything goes out automatically, read the FCC's consumer guide to robocalls and robotexts and the consent rules in Chapter 12.



A left-to-right row of days moving from COUNT to ANSWER ONLINE to CALL BACK to TEST, one task per day.

Thursday to Sunday, the callbacks and the mystery call

Thursday: call back the open list. Work through every missed caller who hasn't heard from you, in the order Chapter 4 lays out, and send a text before you call so your number doesn't show up as a stranger. For every call that changed a booking, check that the change made it onto the order itself, and don't just trust that somebody wrote it down (Chapter 6).

Friday: put one repeat job on paper. Write down the hours you spent last week on work you do the same way every time (Chapter 8). Pick the one job that repeats every week and write it as steps on a single page, in plain words, the way you'd explain it to somebody new (Chapter 10). Keep it short enough that someone could follow it without calling you halfway through. While you're at it, mark the calls that stay yours no matter what, like quotes on unusual jobs and upset customers (Chapter 11).

Saturday: call your own business. At your busiest hour, borrow a phone and call your business like a customer would. Write down how many rings it took, what you heard and whether the details reached you (Chapter 13). If Saturday is a job day for you, even better, because that's the hour a real customer would hit.

Sunday: nothing. Take the day. The list will still be there.

If a day blows up, and some will, slide the whole list back a day. Don't skip ahead. Thursday's callbacks go better when Tuesday's answers are already on your website, and next Monday's count only means something if last Monday's count exists.

Next Monday, hand off one step and count again

Pull the same call log for the week you just finished and count it the same way (Chapter 7). Put it next to last Monday's sheet. Now you have your first before-and-after, and it cost you a week of paying attention and nothing else (Chapter 13). If the numbers got worse, write that down too. A worse week is still information, and it usually points at one day or one habit you can fix.

Then pick one step from Friday's page to hand off. One. A reminder text or a booking link is a good first pick. Before it goes live, write down what it may do on its own and what waits for your yes (Chapter 12). Try it on a few customers. Check that it worked from start to finish. Then turn it on for everyone and add it to your scorecard. All you have to do after that is keep counting.

Some of this week becomes a habit, and some of it you only do once. The Monday count repeats every Monday, from the same log, so a bad week shows up while it's still one week. Every day I look at my own numbers, and you don't have to go that far. The mystery call is worth repeating any time you change something about how your phone gets answered. The callback list stays with you, and it gets shorter as more calls get answered the first time.

If you decide to put a secretary on the line, the same order holds. Keep your number. Switching numbers is scary, and you don't have to do it. Set your phone to forward the calls you don't pick up, so your cell still rings first, and walk through the steps on the KaiCalls call forwarding help page. How fast the forward kicks in depends on your carrier and your settings. Then call the line yourself before a single customer does, and don't forward your real calls until it passes.

Common Questions

What is the first thing to do about missed business calls?

Count them. Pull last week's call log from your phone carrier and write down calls in, answered, missed and called back. Then put a rough price on the missed ones with your own numbers: missed calls, times how many you'd book, times your average job. Every other fix in this book is easier to judge once you have that sheet, because you can count again after.

How do I forward my business calls without changing my number?

Use your carrier's call forwarding for the calls you don't answer. Your number stays the same, and callers dial it like always. Your own phone can still ring first, with the forward kicking in after, though the timing depends on your carrier and your settings. With KaiCalls, the call forwarding help page walks through the steps. Test the forward from another phone before customers start calling.

What should I test before customers start calling a new phone setup?

Test everything a caller can touch, from another phone, before you forward real calls. In a recorded Q&A I gave the whole list: *"You're going to want to test the greeting, the business hours, the after hours route, the emergency handoffs, your lead capture, your notification destinations, booking behavior, and fallbacks."* Call once during the day and once after hours. Fix what's wrong and call again. If Kai is the one answering, the KaiCalls AI receptionist setup guide has a test step with scenarios to try.

Should I automate everything at once?

No. Hand off one step, watch it, and add the next one only when the first is working. Write down what the step may do alone and what waits for your approval, then try it on a few customers first. Even systems that have run for a while can keep the final send with you until they've proven they do the job right, over and over.

Chapter Reflection

A week is short enough to finish and long enough to see something change. By next Monday you'll have two counts, a page of steps, a better greeting and one handed-off job you tested before you trusted it. The Conclusion picks up from there, back at the phone that rang while you were out on a job.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does AI answering sound like a robot to callers?

Some of it still does, and callers notice. A few years ago most of these voices were pretty trash. They've gotten a lot better, and a better voice is still no reason to hide it. Tell callers the line is automated, and pick up yourself whenever your hands are free. The sample intake call on the KaiCalls case studies page opens by telling the caller the conversation is recorded. Then call your own number from another phone and hear what a customer hears.

Is it legal to have AI answer my business line?

The big federal ruling was about calls a business places. The FCC's 2024 ruling on AI-generated voices says those voices count as artificial under the TCPA, and its consent rules apply when you dial out. Answering the calls people make to you is a separate question. Recording, texting and disclosure rules still apply, and they change from state to state. This isn't legal advice, so check your state's rules with an attorney before you go live.

Do I need to tell callers a call is recorded?

In some states, yes, and it's a safe habit everywhere. Federal law needs one person's consent, but a group of states want everyone on the call to agree, and a caller from another state can bring the stricter rule with them. Chapter 12 names those states. So put a recording notice at the start of every call, and confirm your own state's rule with an attorney before you turn recording on.

What does an AI phone secretary cost?

Per KaiCalls' pricing page as of September 2026, Kai Backup is $10 a month for about 20 answered calls, Kai Answering is $79 a month for about 150, and Kai Office is $349 a month for about 600. The KaiCalls pricing page also says plans are a flat monthly price with no per-minute overage. Before you look at any price, do the invoice math from Chapter 1. If one booked job covers the plan, the decision gets easy.

Will an AI secretary work with my calendar?

If you book in Google Calendar or GoHighLevel, Kai can book into it once it's connected. Zapier and Make can carry the call details into other tools you already use. Check the exact list and the setup steps on the KaiCalls integrations page before you sign up for anything. And if your bookings live in a spreadsheet, keep them in the spreadsheet. Send the call details there instead of moving your whole business into a new system.

Do I have to change my business phone number?

No. You can keep your number and forward calls to Kai, use a new KaiCalls number, or port your existing number over. Forwarding is the easy start, because the number your customers already have stays the same and you can undo it later. Set your cell to ring first, so Kai only picks up the calls you miss. The KaiCalls call forwarding help page has the steps by carrier. Test it from another phone before a customer calls.

What if the AI tells a caller the wrong thing?

Set it up to say it doesn't know instead of guessing. Kai shouldn't quote prices unless you put your pricing in, and he should never promise a crew or an arrival time you haven't confirmed. When he doesn't know, he takes a message or offers to get you. Read the call summaries every day for the first few weeks. To change what he says, call Kai and tell him, and the KaiCalls help center covers the rest of the settings.

Who should not use an AI secretary?

If your phone rarely rings, you don't need one. Owners who already pick up every call should keep doing that, because people like reaching a person. Skip it too if nobody will read the call summaries, since then nobody catches the mistakes. And if you handle protected health information, KaiCalls doesn't currently offer a Business Associate Agreement, per the KaiCalls trust center, so talk to your compliance person first. Everyone else should do the free fixes and count a week of calls.

What should I automate first in a small business?

Start with the questions people call about. Write down every reason someone calls you for one week, then put the answers to the top few, usually hours, prices and how to book, on your website, your Google listing and a text reply. Fewer people need to call at all. After that, pick one step that repeats every week, write it on one page and hand off only that step.

Is my customers' data used to train AI?

Not at KaiCalls. Per the KaiCalls trust center, each business's calls, transcripts and lead data are kept separate from every other business and aren't used to train models shared with other customers. You can ask for a record to be deleted, and if you close your account the data leaves with you. The details are in KaiCalls' privacy policy. Ask the same question of any phone tool you're thinking about using.

Conclusion

The phone still rings in the middle of the job. A tent is half up, your hands are full, and somebody who wants a Saturday is listening to it ring.

Back at the tent company my dad and uncle run, the calls kept coming while the crew was out setting up. At a party rental company whose phone I set up, the call got answered and a table and chairs still never made it onto the order. Those two stories carry the whole book. Calls get missed because one person can only hold one phone. And calls get lost after somebody answers, because nothing carries them to the booking.

So the order of the work matters. Count the calls first, since nobody fixes a leak they never measured. Then do the free fixes, starting with picking up when your hands are free. Call back in order of what's at stake. Carry every call into the order and confirm it with the customer.

Only then does automation get a turn. It gets the steps you have written down, and nothing it sends reaches a customer until you approve it. Count before and after every change.

None of that needs software to start. If you get to next week and your own count says the missed calls cost more than a secretary would, start a KaiCalls account and forward only the calls you miss.

Do the week in this order.

1. Monday, count last week's calls from your carrier's call log.
2. Tuesday, write down every reason people call and put the top answers on your website and Google listing.
3. Wednesday, rerecord your voicemail greeting and set a text reply.
4. Thursday, call back the open list in order of what's at stake.
5. Friday, write one repeat job as steps on paper.
6. Saturday, call your own business from another phone at a busy hour.
7. Next week, hand off one step, test it small, approve what goes out and count the same numbers again.

Final Takeaways

1. Price your own missed calls with your own numbers: missed calls a week, how many of those you'd book, and what an average job brings in.
2. Stop treating missed calls as a discipline problem. Look at when the phone rings next to when your hands are full.
3. Pick up whenever your hands are free, and move the hours, price and booking questions onto your website, your Google listing and a text reply.
4. Call back in order of what is at stake, and text first so your number isn't a stranger when it rings.
5. Decide what counts as urgent after hours before the phone rings, and promise a callback time you can keep.
6. Carry every call into the order, then confirm the change back with the customer.
7. Count five things every Monday: calls in, answered live, missed, called back and booked.
8. Write down a week of the repeat work you do by hand, and put a price on an hour of your own time.
9. Make sure the back of the business can keep up before you speed up the front, and gather your scattered information before you automate anything.
10. Write a repeat job down as steps on one page before any software touches it, and keep the tools you already open every day.
11. Keep quotes on unusual jobs, complaints and emotional calls for yourself. Set up a way for those callers to reach you.
12. Tell callers the line is automated, ask for consent before recording or texting where the law requires it, and approve anything automated before it reaches a customer.
13. Measure one change at a time with a before-and-after count, and call your own business from another phone at a busy hour.
14. Work through the week in order, then hand off one step, test it small and count again.

Disclosures

This book was produced by Meet Kai LLC, which makes KaiCalls. It's marketing material, and we've tried to make it useful enough to keep whether or not you ever buy anything from us.

About the numbers. Every figure in this book is cited where it appears. Figures about KaiCalls come from the company's own month-one ledger, published in September 2026. Outside figures come from the regulators, researchers and survey publishers named in the chapters and listed in the Appendix. Those figures describe other businesses, other markets and other years. Results will vary, and nothing here is a projection of what your business would do.

Relationships. The author is the founder of KaiCalls. The tent and party rental company described in this book and in the event rental case studies is owned by the author's father and uncle. The FTC's Endorsement Guides expect a connection like that to be disclosed clearly, so the chapters say so wherever a case study involves the family business.

About the people quoted. The quotes in this book are the author's own words, from his recorded interviews and videos. No customer or operator was paid or compensated for anything in this book, and no third party is quoted.

About pricing. Pricing and product features described here are as of September 2026 and change. Current plans are always on the KaiCalls pricing page.

Not professional advice. This is a business guide. It is not a substitute for advice from a qualified attorney about call recording, texting consent or telemarketing rules in your state.

Call recording and messaging. KaiCalls can record calls and send automated text messages. Consent requirements differ by state and are the business owner's responsibility. Data handling and retention are described in the KaiCalls privacy policy.

Appendix: The Working Kit and Sources

Everything in this section is meant to be copied. The scripts and forms come from the chapters, and the list at the end names every outside source the book leans on, with the chapter where it shows up.

The voicemail greeting

From Chapter 3. Swap in your own details and keep it under half a minute.

You've reached {business name}.

Nobody can get to the phone right now, most likely because the crew is out on a job.

Leave your name, your number, the date you need and what you need done.

You'll get a call back by {a time you can keep, like 7 tonight}.

Hours, prices and booking are on {your website}.

If the job is today or tomorrow, say that first.

The text-back reply

From Chapter 3. Set it as the automatic reply for missed calls if your phone or carrier offers one. Keep it informational. Marketing texts need written consent, per the FCC consumer guide from Chapter 3.

Hi, this is {your name} at {business name}.

Missed your call while out on a job.

Reply with the date and what you need, and a call back is coming by {time}.

Hours and prices are at {link}.

Reply STOP and these texts stop.

The repeat questions to answer before anyone calls

From Chapter 3. The biggest piles on most call sheets are hours, price and booking. Put each answer where callers look first, meaning your website, your Google listing, your voicemail greeting and your text reply.

1. Hours. Post your hours, your holiday hours and how far out you book.
2. Price. Post a starting price or a range, or list what the quote depends on.
3. Booking. Post the one way to book, whether that's a form, a link or a text.

The callback rule

From Chapter 4. Work the list top to bottom. Text first, then call, so your number is not a stranger when it rings.

Tier	Who is on it	When to call back
1	**A booked customer with a problem or a change, anyone with a date coming up soon, or a voicemail that says today**	**At your very next break**
2	New quote requests, general questions and unknown numbers that left no message	Your same-day callback block, with a text first
3	Vendors, sales pitches and marketing calls	When you get to it, or not at all

The index-card test for automation

From Chapter 10. Before any software touches a job, write that job on one index card. Automate it only when every line below is true.

- It happens every week.

- The steps fit on the card, in order.
- Someone other than you could follow the card without calling you.
- A wrong result would be easy for you to spot.

If one line is false, keep doing that job by hand for now.

The three ground rules for AI on your phone line

From Chapter 12. Not legal advice. Check your state's rules with an attorney.

1. Tell callers the line is automated and that the call may be recorded, wherever consent rules require it.
2. Nothing goes out without your approval. A quote or a promised arrival time reaches a customer only after you sign off on it.
3. It says it does not know instead of guessing, and it takes a message or gets you on the line.

Test all three by calling your own number from another phone before a customer does. If Kai answers your line, the KaiCalls AI receptionist setup guide lists test calls to try.

The Monday tally

From Chapter 7. Fill in one row every Monday from your carrier's call log, your voicemail and your texts.

Week of	Calls in	Answered live	Missed	Called back same day	Booked

The book on one page

Part One is the phone. Price your missed calls with your own numbers. Quit blaming yourself for them, because one person holds one phone. Fix what is free first. Call back in order of what is at stake. Decide what after hours means before it happens. Carry every call into the order. Count every Monday.

Part Two is automation. Price an hour of your own time. Make sure the back of the business can keep up before you speed up the front. Write the steps down before software touches them. Keep the calls that need you. Set the ground rules and approve what goes out. Prove it paid with a before-and-after count.

Then work one week in order, and count again.

Sources cited in this book

Each source below carries the same link as the chapter where it appears. Sources linked twice in the chapters are listed without a third link.

Regulators and industry bodies

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- **Federal Reserve Banks, Small Business Credit Survey (2026)**: AI use among employer firms and the problems users run into, Chapters 8 and 9. Federal Reserve Banks' 2026 Small Business Credit Survey
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Where this book comes from

The chapters come from Connor Gallic's own recorded interviews and videos, and from what he saw firsthand at his family's tent and party rental company and at KaiCalls. Figures about KaiCalls come from the company's month-one ledger, published in September 2026. Every outside figure is cited in the chapter where it appears and listed above. Where a source is old, was produced by a company that sells software, or measured web leads instead of phone calls, the chapter says so next to the number.

KaiCalls

kaicalls.com