

Hit Your Response-Time Standard

How fast is fast enough depends on what kind of business you are.

TIME	COST	DIFFICULTY	AUDIT SIGNAL
1 hour to set up	Free	Easy	seconds_to_human_within_class_bar

WHAT WE MEASURED

We measured how many seconds it took to reach a human, and compared it against the standard for your business class.

WHY IT MATTERS

The two most-cited studies on response speed are worth knowing accurately, because they're usually quoted wrong.

Harvard Business Review, 2011 — 1.25 million online leads across 42 companies. Firms contacting a lead **within one hour** were about **7× more likely to qualify it** than those responding in the second hour, and **more than 60× more likely** than those waiting 24 hours or more. In the same study, **23% of companies never responded at all**, and the average first response among those who did respond was **42 hours**.

A second study using platform data found the odds of *contacting* a lead drop roughly **100× between 5 minutes and 30 minutes**.

Two honest caveats: both studies are from 2007–2011, and phone behaviour has changed a great deal since. And neither measured revenue — they measured contact and qualification. The claim that responding in five minutes multiplies your revenue is not supported by either.

What is well supported: **within one hour is the real threshold, and past 24 hours you are statistically close to not having responded at all.**

FIX IT YOURSELF

1 Find your standard

Different businesses are held to different bars, because a roofing emergency and a legal consultation aren't the same thing. Your audit report names your class. The targets:

YOUR BUSINESS TYPE	BRONZE	SILVER	GOLD	PLATINUM
Solo / micro (coach, consultant, food truck)	same business day	4 hrs	1 hr	30 min
Local standard (salon, shop, restaurant)	4 business hrs	1 hr	30 min	15 min
Field service (HVAC, roofing, plumbing)	4 business hrs	1 hr	15 min	24/7 verified
Professional / regulated (law, dental, accounting)	1 business day	4 business hrs	1 business hr	30 min

2 Measure where you actually are

For two weeks, log every inbound call and inquiry: when it came in, and when a human actually responded.

Don't estimate. Owners consistently guess much faster than reality, because the fast responses are the ones you remember.

3 Fix the biggest gap first

Look at your log and find the pattern. It's almost always one of these:

- **Calls during jobs** → set up conditional forwarding (see *Make Sure Your Phone Gets Answered*)
- **Calls after hours** → set up an after-hours path (see *Handle After-Hours Calls*)
- **Web form inquiries** → get notifications on your phone (see *Respond to Web Inquiries Fast*)
- **One person is a bottleneck** → add a backup on the rotation

4 Set a rule you can actually keep

Write it down and tell your team:

"Every inbound call gets a human within ____ minutes during business hours, and a callback by ____ the next morning if it comes in after hours."

An honest standard you hit beats an ambitious one you miss. Customers forgive a stated four-hour response. They don't forgive a promised fifteen minutes that takes two days.

5 Publish it

Put your standard on your website next to your phone number: *"We answer during business hours and return every after-hours call by 8am."*

This converts. It's specific, it's checkable, and almost none of your competitors say anything at all.

CHECK YOUR WORK

- ☐ You know which class standard applies to you.
- ☐ You have two weeks of real response-time data.
- ☐ You've fixed the largest gap.
- ☐ You have a written internal standard.
- ☐ Your standard is published on your website.

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Measuring only the calls you remember.** Log everything.
- **Publishing a standard you can't hit.** Set it where you actually live, then improve it.
- **Counting an auto-reply as a response.** The clock stops when a human responds.

This fix is free. You can earn and keep any Agenarys Seal tier — including Platinum — without paying Agenarys anything beyond the audit itself. If you would rather have help doing it, we sell that. We never sell passage.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington — 'The Short Life of Online Sales Leads,' Harvard Business Review, March 2011

Lead Response Management study (InsideSales platform data)

Note: both datasets are 2007–2011; treat the direction as robust and the multipliers as dated.