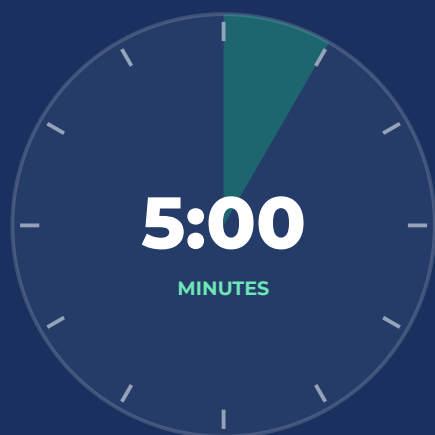


 PLAYBOOK

The Speed-to-Lead **Follow-up** System

How to answer, qualify and book every enquiry before it goes cold, and follow up until there's a clear answer.



New enquiry · 10:02

Hi Sam, thanks for asking about...

Called · qualified · 10:06



Consultation booked

Thu 3:00 pm · reminder set

12 chapters

44 editable templates

14-day cadence + 90-day nurture

Lead tracker with SLA dashboard

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The system on one page



Who this is not for

- **Online stores where people buy without talking to anyone.** Your follow-up is abandoned-cart and browse flows, not calls.
- **Cold outbound prospecting.** Everything here assumes the person contacted you first. Cold outreach has different rules, different consent requirements and different scripts.
- **Anyone looking for a software recommendation.** We name tools where you need them, but the system runs in any CRM, an inbox tool or the spreadsheet in this pack.

If you get fewer than about 5 leads a week, everything still applies, but the weekly numbers will swing too much to read. Review them monthly instead.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE ONE HOUR TODAY

- ☐ Send yourself a test enquiry through every channel you advertise, and write down when the first automatic reply and the first human reply arrived (chapter 2).
- ☐ Switch on an instant acknowledgement for your main form and your WhatsApp number (T01 and T03).
- ☐ Decide who owns new leads tomorrow, and who covers them if that person is busy (chapter 3).
- ☐ Open the tracker and start logging every new lead from today.

01

What the research says about speed, and what it doesn't

Almost every speed-to-lead article repeats the same few numbers. The two main studies are 15 and 19 years old, one number is usually credited to the wrong study, and one can't be traced at all. Here is what each study actually measured, so your targets rest on solid ground.

The 2007 call-log study: where "21 times" comes from

In October 2007, the CEO of InsideSales.com and researcher James Oldroyd presented an analysis at a B2B marketing summit, using three years of data from the company's calling software: six companies, more than 15,000 web leads and more than 100,000 call attempts.

The definitions matter. A **contact** was a call that reached a live person and lasted a set time. A **qualified** lead was whatever each company called qualified; for some, that meant agreeing to an appointment. And the study says plainly that it "did not address close ratios": it measured conversations, not sales.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

"The odds of contacting a lead if called in 5 minutes versus 30 minutes drop 100 times. The odds of qualifying a lead if called in 5 minutes versus 30 minutes drop 21 times." Going from 5 to 10 minutes cut the odds of contact by 5 times and the odds of qualifying by 4 times. — [InsideSales.com and Oldroyd, Lead Response Management Study, 2007](#)

The 2011 HBR article: where "7 times" and "42 hours" come from

In March 2011, Harvard Business Review published "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads" by Oldroyd, Kristina McElheran and David Elkington. It reported two separate pieces of research.

The first was an audit. The authors submitted a test lead to 2,241 companies and timed the reply.

37%

of 2,241 companies replied to a test lead within an hour

HBR, 2011

23%

never replied at all

HBR, 2011

42 hrs

average reply time among companies that replied within 30 days

HBR, 2011

The second analysed 1.25 million leads received by 29 B2C and 13 B2B companies. Firms that contacted a lead within an hour were nearly 7 times as likely to qualify it as firms that waited one more hour, and more than 60 times as likely as firms that waited 24 hours or longer. "Qualify" here meant "having a meaningful conversation with a key decision maker".

The [HBR article](#) is paywalled, so these figures are quoted from [SmartCompany's 2011 report on it](#).

How these numbers get misquoted

What you'll read	What the study actually said	How to use it
"Leads called within 5 minutes are 21× more likely to convert"	21× higher odds of <i>qualifying</i> , by each company's own definition, compared with calling at 30 minutes. Phone only, six companies, 2007. Sales weren't measured	As direction: the first minutes matter most. Don't put "21× more sales" in a business case
"Harvard Business Review found 21× and 100×"	HBR reported 7× (within an hour vs an hour later) and 60× (vs 24 hours or more). The 21× and 100× come from the 2007 call-log study	Credit the right study
"An MIT study"	Vendor data from the company's calling system, analysed by an academic who was then an MIT faculty fellow, presented at an industry summit. It wasn't published in a peer-reviewed journal	Call it what it is: vendor data with an academic analysis
"78% of customers buy from the first company to respond"	We couldn't trace this to any primary report. Every page that uses it cites another page	Don't use it. For real estate, Zillow's 2025 figure below is a real alternative
"Call on Thursday between 4 and 6 pm"	The 2007 study did find day and time effects. Later data from Velocify put the gap between the best and worst time of day at 2.6 percentage points	Call when the lead arrives. Use time-of-day only for later attempts
"After 20 hours, more calls hurt"	The 2007 study found that, then wrote: "We don't know" why	Don't stop at 20 hours. Switch channels and space out the attempts (chapter 6)

What newer data adds

The old studies were about phone calls to web leads. More recent data covers persistence, channels and how often companies still miss the first hour.

- **Persistence wins contacts.** In Velocify's data on nearly 3.5 million leads (2012), "93% of converted leads are contacted by the 6th call attempt." ([Velocify](#))
- **Most teams still don't respond in minutes.** NP Digital surveyed 500 marketers in February 2026. Only 3% said they respond within 5 minutes, and 28% said they have no defined process. ([NP Digital, 2026](#))
- **Most follow-up stops early.** In a 2024 test by RevenueHero, a lead-routing vendor, 365 of 1,000 B2B software companies replied to a demo request, after an average of 1 day, 5 hours and 17 minutes, with "only 2 follow ups on an average". ([RevenueHero, 2024](#))
- **The first good conversation often wins.** In Zillow's 2025 survey, "47% of buyers hired the first agent they spoke with, and 59% of sellers did the same." ([Zillow, 2025](#))
- **Relevance beats volume.** Gartner surveyed 632 B2B buyers in 2024: "73% of B2B buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach." ([Gartner, 2025](#))

How fast marketers say they respond to new leads (500 marketers, 2026)



These are what marketers say about themselves, not timed tests. Source: [NP Digital, 2026](#).

What we take from all of it

KEY IDEA

Speed gets you the conversation. Persistence across channels gets you the contact. Relevance gets you the sale. You need all three, and only the first one is about minutes.

1. **Start a human response within 5 minutes during staffed hours.** The steepest drop in every study is in the first minutes. So few teams manage it that you don't need to be perfect to stand out.
2. **An automatic reply is an acknowledgement, not a response.** Measure the first human touch separately.
3. **Plan for six call attempts, with messages in between,** spread over two weeks.
4. **Make every touch useful:** an answer, an option or a question, never "just checking in".
5. **Measure your own baseline.** Studies give direction; your tracker shows your leaks. Start by sending a test enquiry through every channel you advertise (chapter 2).



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