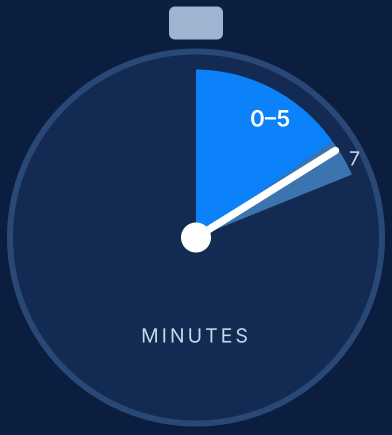
Service ProCall

FOR OWNERS OF HVAC, PLUMBING & ELECTRICAL COMPANIES

The 7-Minute Rule

Why call response time determines your close rate — and what it means for your call operation.

8-minute read · Includes a worked example you can run on your own numbers



100×
higher odds of **reaching** a lead called at 5 minutes vs. 30 minutes

21×
higher odds of **qualifying** that lead over the same 25-minute gap

42 hrs
average first response time across 2,241 U.S. companies audited by HBR

01 · THE WINDOW

Your lead is shopping. You have about five minutes before they stop.

When a homeowner fills out a form at 7:40 on a Tuesday night because the water heater is leaking, they are not filling out one form. They are filling out three. Whoever calls back first usually gets the job — not because they are the best contractor, but because they are the first one to make the problem feel handled.

That instinct is backed by data. The most-cited research on the subject, the Lead Response Management study by Dr. James Oldroyd of MIT and InsideSales.com, analyzed thousands of web leads across hundreds of companies. Its headline finding: the odds of **making contact** with a lead fell roughly 100-fold when the first call came at 30 minutes instead of 5. The odds of **qualifying** that lead fell about 21-fold over the same gap.

Why do we call it the **7-minute rule**? Because five minutes is the target and seven is the line you never cross. Real call operations have queues, hold times and dialing delays. Building your process around a hard seven-minute ceiling is what keeps the median response comfortably inside the five-minute window the research rewards.

FIGURE 1 · THE LEAD-RESPONSE WINDOW



0–5 min	5–7 min	7–30 min	30–60 min	1–24 hrs	24 hrs +
Win zone. Lead is still on the page, phone in hand.	**Outer limit.** Build your process so nothing lands past here.	Competitors are calling. Contact odds falling fast.	Contact odds roughly 1/100th of the 5-minute call.	HBR: qualifying odds ~7× lower than inside the first hour.	HBR: ~60× lower than calling within the hour.

Zones are drawn to communicate priority, not to scale. Figures from Oldroyd & InsideSales.com Lead Response Management study (2007) and Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington, "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads," Harvard Business Review (2011).

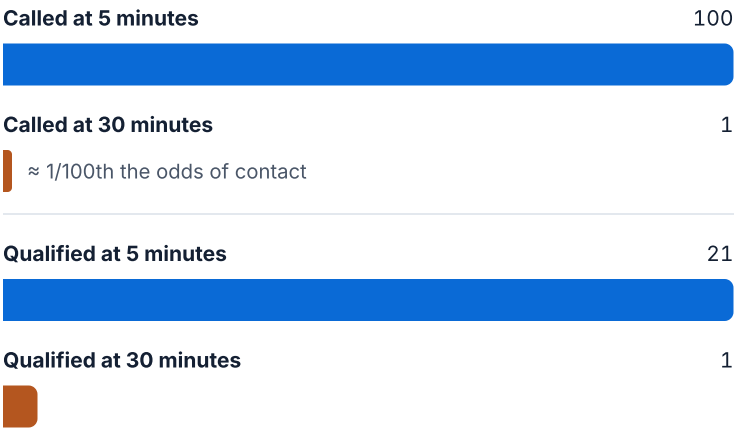
02 · WHY SPEED BEATS SALES SKILL

The first caller sets the price, the schedule and the standard.

In home services, the first contractor to reach the homeowner gets three advantages nobody else gets. They anchor the price. They claim the earliest open slot on the calendar. And they become the yardstick the others are measured against — "the other company already said they could be here tomorrow morning."

A great CSR who calls in 45 minutes is competing for second place. An average CSR who calls in four minutes is having a conversation with a homeowner who has not heard from anyone else yet. Speed is not a replacement for good scripting, but good scripting cannot recover a lead nobody picks up for.

FIGURE 2 · RELATIVE ODDS OF REACHING THE LEAD

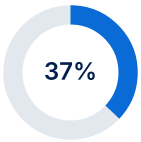


Indexed so the 30-minute call = 1. Source: Lead Response Management study (MIT / InsideSales.com).

03 · MOST COMPANIES ARE NOWHERE CLOSE

The bar is low. That is the opportunity.

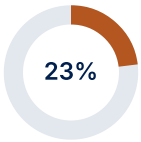
When Harvard Business Review audited how fast 2,241 U.S. companies answered web leads, the results were sobering. Only about a third responded within an hour, the average first response took nearly two days, and almost a quarter never responded at all. Home service companies are not immune — techs are in the field, the office manager is juggling the dispatch board, and the form sits in an inbox until someone has a free minute.



of companies responded to a web lead **within one hour**



42 hours — the average time to a first response



never responded to the lead at all

Source: Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington, "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads," Harvard Business Review, March 2011.

04 · WHAT IT MEANS IN DOLLARS

A worked example: same leads, faster response.

Research tells you the direction. Your own numbers tell you the size. Here is a simple model for a residential service company. Every input is an assumption — replace them with yours.

ASSUMPTIONS

Web & form leads per month	**200**
Booking rate once you reach them	**50%**
Average first-visit ticket	**$450**
Contact rate, slow response	**40%**
Contact rate, under 5 minutes	**70%**

FIGURE 3 · MONTHLY BOOKED REVENUE FROM THE SAME 200 LEADS

Slow response · 80 reached · 40 jobs — **$18,000**



Under 5 minutes · 140 reached · 70 jobs — **$31,500**



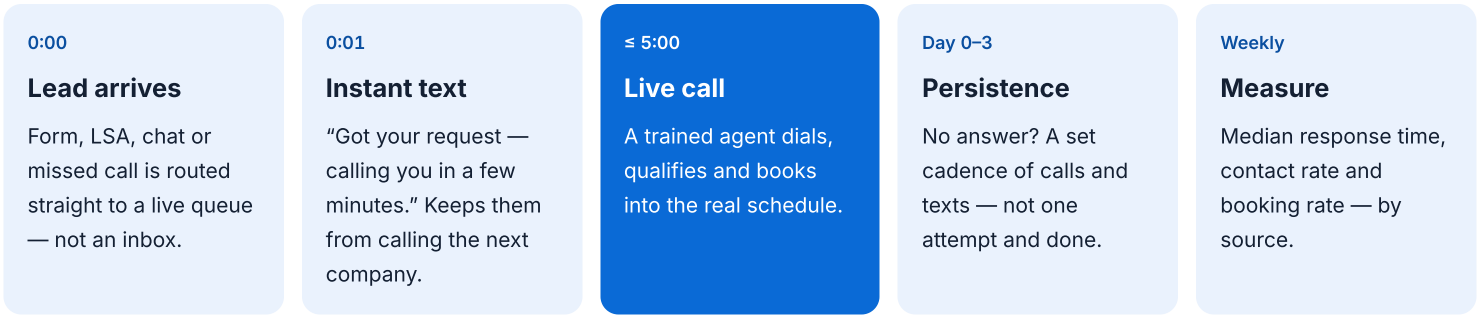
+$13,500 per month

+$162,000 per year, first visits only

That number does not include what happens after the first visit: maintenance agreements, replacement opportunities, and referrals. And it requires no additional marketing spend — the leads are already paid for. Speed simply stops you from throwing away a portion of every lead budget you have already committed.

Five things a 7-minute operation does differently

FIGURE 4 · A SPEED-TO-LEAD SEQUENCE



1. Leads go to people, not inboxes

Every lead source — web forms, Google Local Services, Angi, chat — should trigger a call task in a live queue. If someone has to “check the inbox,” you have already lost minutes.

2. Someone owns the clock

Speed dies when responding is everyone’s job. Assign a dedicated person or team whose first priority is new-lead response, with coverage for lunch, evenings and weekends.

3. Measure the median, not the best case

Track median and 90th-percentile response time weekly. A team that averages four minutes but lets one in ten leads sit for three hours still has a leak.

4. Book on the first call

A fast call that ends with “someone will call you to schedule” wastes the advantage. Agents need live access to the schedule and authority to book.

5. Keep after the ones you miss

Not every lead answers the first call. A structured multi-day cadence of calls and texts recovers a meaningful share of leads that a single attempt would have written off.

YOUR MONDAY CHECKLIST

Find out your real response time this week

- Pull every web lead from the last 30 days and the timestamp of the first outbound call to each.
- Calculate the median and the slowest 10%. Separate business hours from evenings and weekends.
- Submit a test form on your own site at 6:45 pm on a weekday. Time how long it takes to hear back.
- Count how many leads never received a second attempt.

SERVICE PROCALL · LEAD RESPONSE

Every lead called in minutes — days, nights and weekends.

Our trained agents work your leads the moment they arrive and book directly into your schedule. See what your current response time is costing you.

800-458-6211

serviceprocall.com

SOURCES

1. Oldroyd, J. & Elkington, D. (InsideSales.com / MIT), Lead Response Management Study, 2007.

2. Oldroyd, J., McElheran, K. & Elkington, D., “The Short Life of Online Sales Leads,” Harvard Business Review, March 2011.

Worked example figures are illustrative assumptions, not guarantees. © Service ProCall.