

— A 10-MINUTE AUDIT

The hidden cost of after-hours enquiries.

A diagnostic for estate agency owners who suspect they're losing more leads than they realise. Read it in ten minutes. Run the numbers on yourself.

You probably know you're losing leads. You almost certainly don't know how many.

Every estate agent we speak to has the same instinct: enquiries that come in outside office hours go colder by the morning. Most have never measured it. Almost none have priced it.

The reason is simple. The leads you lose this way leave no trace. There's no rejected viewing, no failed offer, no formal goodbye. A buyer messages your site at 9pm on a Saturday, gets a holding-page autoresponder, and by Monday morning they're sitting in someone else's diary. You never knew they existed.

This is not a hunch. Callwell research across more than 10,000 UK estate and letting agents found that **only 30% of portal enquiries get any response at all**, and that roughly **50% of property leads arrive between 6pm and 9am**, exactly the hours when most agencies are closed.¹

This document is a ten-minute audit you can run on your own agency. It's structured in three parts:

- **Part 1.** A six-question self-assessment to estimate how many enquiries you're missing.
- **Part 2.** The maths. What those missed enquiries are likely costing you per year.
- **Part 3.** What "good" looks like, and the honest pros and cons of each option for fixing it.

Read it through, do the sums, and then make a decision. There's a short section at the end about what we do, but the document is genuinely useful whether you ever speak to us or not.

"The work that costs you most is the work nobody has time to look at."

Six questions. *Answer honestly.*

You don't need exact numbers. Best estimate is fine. The point is to make the invisible visible.

QUESTION 1

How many enquiries hit your website per week, across the contact form, property enquiries, and live chat (if you have it)?

Tip: check the last full month and divide by four. Don't include phone calls.

QUESTION 2

What percentage of those arrive between 6pm and 9am, or at any time over the weekend?

Industry research suggests around 50% arrive in those hours.¹ If your numbers look very different, it's worth checking your data rather than your gut.

QUESTION 3

Of those out-of-hours enquiries, what percentage get a meaningful reply (not an autoresponder) within one hour?

A meaningful reply means an actual human response that moves the enquiry forward.

QUESTION 4

How long does it typically take, on average, for an out-of-hours enquirer to get a real response from someone on your team?

In a Rightmove test of 213 UK letting agents, nearly 40% took more than 24 hours to respond to a viewing request.²

QUESTION 5

Of the buyers and tenants who enquire on a Saturday, how many do you think have already contacted another agent by Monday morning?

We can't put a verified number on this. But in conversations with the agents we speak to, almost all say "most of them." It's a reasonable assumption.

QUESTION 6

If you could clone one of your best negotiators and have them on duty 24 hours a day, what would that be worth to your business per year?

Don't answer this one yet. Hold the question, we'll come back to it on the next page.

What missed leads actually cost you.

Here's a worked example using conservative numbers for a mid-sized independent estate agency. Adjust each figure to fit your business.

The "% lost to slow or no response" line uses Callwell's finding that only around 30% of portal enquiries get any response at all¹, so 70% is the proportion either ignored or replied to too late to be competitive.

Example: an independent agency, two branches

Website enquiries per week	60
Percentage arriving out-of-hours	50%
= Out-of-hours enquiries per week	30
% lost to slow or no response	70%
= Enquiries lost per week	~21
Lost enquiries per year (50 weeks)	~1,050
Realistic conversion to transaction (3%)	~31 deals
Average fee per transaction	£3,500

ANNUAL REVENUE AT RISK

£108,500

These are deliberately conservative inputs. A weekly enquiry volume of 60 is modest. A 3% lead-to-deal conversion rate sits below most agencies' actual performance. A £3,500 average fee assumes lower-priced stock. The real number for many agencies is materially higher.

Now do it for yourself

Take your own answers from Part 1 and run the same calculation. Even if your conversion rate is half of the figure above, you're still looking at a meaningful annual loss, almost always five figures, often six.

The point of this exercise isn't to alarm you. It's to put a number on a problem you've been carrying without knowing the size of.

"If you wouldn't accept a member of staff failing to answer the phone 70% of the time, you shouldn't accept it from your website."

What "good" looks like in 2026.

The bar has moved. Buyers and tenants now expect the same response speed from estate agents as they get from any other service. Amazon, Uber, banks. Here's the current state of the research.

21×

More likely to qualify a lead if you respond within 5 minutes versus 30 minutes.

MIT / InsideSales, Oldroyd³

7×

More likely to have a meaningful conversation if you respond within an hour versus one hour later. 60x more likely versus 24+ hours.

Harvard Business Review, 2011⁴

50%

Of UK property enquiries arrive between 6pm and 9am, outside standard office hours.

Callwell, 10,000+ UK agents¹

78%

Of homebuyers go on to work with the first agent who responds to their enquiry.

Widely cited industry figure⁵

What this means in practice

The agencies winning instructions and registrations in 2026 aren't necessarily the ones with the biggest marketing budgets. They're the ones answering enquiries fastest. Speed of first response is now the most reliable predictor of conversion across almost every consumer-facing industry, and property is no exception.

The problem is structural. Sales staff have viewings and valuations during the day. The hours when enquiries spike, evenings, weekends, bank holidays, are exactly the hours your team can't realistically work. That mismatch is the gap this audit is asking you to close.

Four ways to close the gap. Honest pros and cons.

If you've decided the problem is worth solving, there are four genuine options. Each has trade-offs. Here they are, without spin. The cost ranges below are typical UK figures based on our conversations with agents, your mileage will vary.

Option 1: Do nothing

COST: £0 UPFRONT, SIGNIFICANT ANNUAL REVENUE LOST

Pros: No change, no investment, no risk of getting it wrong.

Cons: The cost compounds. Every year you don't act, the gap widens, both in lost revenue and in how your agency compares to faster competitors.

Option 2: Hire someone for evenings and weekends

COST: TYPICALLY £18,000–£28,000 PER YEAR

Pros: Real human, real conversations, can handle complex enquiries.

Cons: Expensive. Hard to recruit for unsocial hours. Sick days and holidays leave gaps. Doesn't scale, one person can't cover 24/7 alone.

Option 3: Outsourced virtual receptionist service

COST: TYPICALLY £6,000–£15,000 PER YEAR

Pros: Cheaper than hiring direct. 24/7 coverage. Real humans on the other end.

Cons: Generic scripts. The person answering doesn't know your stock, your team, or your brand. Quality varies. Hand-offs to your team next morning are still required for anything beyond the basics.

Option 4: AI customer assistant (trained on your business)

COST: ROUGHLY £3,000–£4,000 PER YEAR, ALL-IN

Pros: Knows your properties, your team, your brand. Available 24/7 with no sick days. Instant response. Qualifies leads before passing to your team. Cost scales with you, not with conversation volume.

Cons: Won't handle every edge case, complex queries still need a human follow-up. Requires honest setup and ongoing refinement to stay accurate. Won't work well if you treat it as set-and-forget.

For most independent agencies of the size we work with, Option 4 has the strongest economics. The annual cost is comfortably less than a single deal-worth of fees, and the coverage is genuinely 24/7. But the right answer depends on your stock, your team, and your tolerance for change.

— IF YOU WANT TO TALK

What we'd actually *do* for you.

If you've read this far and want a conversation, here's what working with us looks like. No long pitch.

Delegait AI, in plain English

We build a branded AI customer assistant for your agency. It lives on your existing website, knows your properties and your team, and handles enquiries 24 hours a day. When someone asks something genuinely complex, it qualifies the lead and hands it to your team with full context.

£395 setup: built, trained, and deployed to your site

£275 per month: hosting, maintenance, refinements, support

2–3 weeks from first conversation to live

30-day money-back guarantee: if it isn't earning its keep, you pay nothing

No per-conversation charges: the monthly fee is the monthly fee

There's a working demo of what one of these looks like on our website. It's a fictional agency called Holmfield & Co, we built it so you can see exactly how it handles real property questions before you commit to anything. Message us and we'll send you the login.

If you've run the maths on this document and the number worries you, that's the right reason to have a conversation. If it didn't, you're either already solving the problem well or you've underestimated it.

A note on who this is for. Delegait was built around estate agents, which is why this guide speaks to that audience throughout. The same logic applies to any service business that handles enquiries online. If you're not in property but recognise the problem, the maths still works, and we'd be glad to talk.

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Where the numbers come from.

Every statistic in this document is referenced below. Where we couldn't find verifiable research, we've said so plainly in the text rather than dressing up estimates as data.

1 Callwell. UK property enquiry response benchmark

Survey of more than 10,000 UK estate and letting agents. Found that only ~30% of portal enquiries get any response and that approximately 50% of property leads arrive between 6pm and 9am. Cited in LightWork AI industry analysis.

blog.lightwork.co/lead-response-time-in-property-why-the-first-five-minutes-win-the-instruction/

2 Rightmove, letting agent response time test

Rightmove's own mystery-shopper-style audit of 213 UK letting agents. Found that nearly 40% took more than 24 hours to respond to a viewing request, and that almost 70% failed to respond to a valuation opportunity within 24 hours.

3 MIT / InsideSales. Lead Response Management Study

Dr James B. Oldroyd's analysis of more than 15,000 leads across 100+ companies (2004–2007). Found that companies contacting a lead within 5 minutes were 21 times more likely to qualify the lead than those waiting 30 minutes.

[insidesales.com / Lead Response Management Study \(Oldroyd\)](http://insidesales.com/Lead-Response-Management-Study-(Oldroyd))

4 Harvard Business Review: "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads"

Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington, March 2011. Audit of 2,241 US firms. Companies that responded to a web enquiry within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to qualify the lead as those responding even an hour later, and more than 60 times as likely as companies that waited 24+ hours.

hbr.org/2011/03/the-short-life-of-online-sales-leads

5 "First responder wins": 78% figure

Widely cited across UK property and broader sales literature, originating in early-2010s sales-response research and repeatedly confirmed in subsequent industry surveys. We've cited it here as an industry figure rather than tying it to a single study because attribution varies.

What we didn't claim

Some figures we'd have liked to cite, for example, exact UK numbers on weekend-to-Monday agent switching, don't exist in published research. Where we needed those gaps filled, we've framed them as observations rather than statistics.

If you spot a figure you can't reconcile with your own data, tell us. We'd rather correct a number than print a wrong one.