

CALL FLOW DESIGN · 2026

A Call Flow People Do Not Hate

Greeting wording, when a menu is the wrong answer, queue settings, overflow, and the seven test calls that find everything broken in about fifteen minutes.

Nobody sets out to build a bad phone menu. They get built one reasonable decision at a time, by people who already know what all the departments are called. **Start from the calls, not the org chart:** sort your last two hundred calls by what the caller actually wanted, and count them. The most common reason for ringing should need the least effort. Anything under five per cent should not be an option at all.

■ The greeting. Use the left, not the right

Use	Instead of
"Thanks for calling Harper Plumbing. I will put you through to our team now."	Twenty seconds about being a leading provider since 1994, then the website address, then "our menu options have recently changed".
"If this is a burst pipe or a blocked drain, press 1 and we will get to you first. For anything else, stay on."	Press 1 for sales, 2 for accounts, 3 for service, 4 for the warehouse, 5 for all other enquiries, 9 to repeat.
"Our team is on other calls, so you are third in line, or press 1 and we will ring you back without losing your place."	Forty seconds of music with no indication of anything at all.

■ Menu rules, if you need one at all

- **One level. Never two.** A submenu is where callers give up.
- **Four options maximum, three is better.** Past four they forget the first and pick whatever they heard last.
- **Most common first**, ordered by your real call counts, not by department seniority.
- **Say the option before the number.** "For a repair, press 1", not "press 1 for a repair".
- **Silence must reach a person**, not loop. People are driving.
- **Zero always works**, announced or not. Hiding the exit is the most resented pattern there is.
- **Never ask a question you cannot act on.** Asking for an account number and not using it is worse than not asking.

Rename the options. Twenty minutes, costs nothing, biggest single win

"Customer service" sorts nothing, because every caller thinks that is what their call is. Use **"an order you have already placed"**. "Accounts" reads as opening one: use **"a bill or a payment"**. Nobody outside your business knows what "operations" does: use **"a booking or a job time"**. And delete "general enquiries" entirely, because it collects every uncertain caller and becomes your biggest queue staffed by your least specialised people.

■ Overflow. Every branch needs a defined end

Stage	What happens	Timing
First group	The people who should get it. Two or more, never one.	15 to 20 seconds
Widen	Anybody else who could reasonably help.	A further 15 to 20 seconds
Queue or callback	Join the queue, or offer the callback that holds their place.	To your defined maximum
Defined end	An AI answer that books a time, or a monitored mailbox with a stated commitment.	Always. This is the step that is missing.

The unbounded ring is invisible and expensive

A caller with no information, no options and no idea whether anybody will answer hangs up at about forty seconds and rings the next business on the list. **Nothing in your system records that they existed**, which is exactly why this failure never appears in a report and why businesses go years without finding it.

■ The seven test calls. Fifteen minutes, from an outside mobile

- 1 8:35am on a Monday.** The busiest moment. Most flows are only ever tested at 2pm on a Wednesday.
- 2 Say nothing at all.** Silence must reach a person, not loop.
- 3 Press zero immediately.** The most common caller behaviour there is.
- 4 Choose the wrong option on purpose.** Can they transfer it, and does the context travel?
- 5 Let it ring out completely.** This is where the unbounded ring gets found.
- 6 6:15pm, and again on a Saturday.** After hours is configured once and never verified.
- 7 From a mobile on one bar.** That is how a real share of your calls actually arrive.

■ Ten faults, and nine of them are in your system right now

- A ring group with one person in it. Adding a second prevents more lost calls than anything else here.
- Public holidays loaded for last year only. Load twelve months ahead, by state.
- A menu option routing to somebody who left. Walk every option quarterly, ten minutes.
- Hold music that stops, so callers think they were cut off.
- Zero looping back to the menu instead of reaching a person.
- An after hours message recorded by somebody who no longer works there.
- **A mailbox nobody owns.** One of the most reliable sources of lost business anywhere.

Have an outsider make three of the calls

You cannot hear your own call flow, because you already know what every option means and which one you want. Ask somebody who does not work there to ring with a specific goal and describe what happened. Their hesitation is the data. It is the only reliable way to discover that "operations" means nothing to anyone outside the building.