

CHOOSING A PROVIDER · SUPPORT 2026

Find a Tech Partner Who Takes Your Call.

Features look the same across providers. What happens when something breaks does not. How to find, and test, a partner who picks up.

For a small business without an IT team, **support is part of the product**. It is also the part you cannot see in a demo, and it is getting harder to reach.

Why support is getting harder to reach

- Phone numbers hidden behind help centres, chatbots and ticket forms.
- Resold platforms, where the company you pay does not run the system.
- Problems that cross your internet, provider and platform, with each pointing at the others.
- Gartner (July 2024): **64%** of customers would prefer companies did not use AI for service, and **60%** worry it makes reaching a person harder.

Six signs a provider cares about your business

Sign	What you can check
Answers the phone	A published support number, a person in reasonable time
Knows your setup	Can see your account, numbers and call flows
Speaks plainly	Explains what went wrong without jargon
Tells you first	Outage and maintenance notices before customers notice
Owens the problem	Helps find the cause even when it is not theirs
Tells you what not to buy	Flags unused licences and unneeded upgrades

What poor support costs you

- **Missed calls** while phones are down or misrouted.
- **The owner's time** on hold and in chat windows.
- **Workarounds that stick**, like diverting to a personal mobile for a year.
- **Features you pay for and never use** because nobody helped set them up.

■ Test them before you sign

- 1 **Ring the support line, not sales.** Time how long it takes to reach a person.
- 2 **Call at an awkward time**, late Friday or first thing Monday.
- 3 **Ask a real question**, like where calls go if the internet drops.
- 4 **Ask who fixes what.** Do they run the platform or resell it?
- 5 **Talk to a customer your size**, or read reviews that mention support.
- 6 **Read the support clause:** hours, escalation, extra charges, exit terms.

■ Questions and what to listen for

Ask	Good answer	Warning sign
How do I reach support?	"Ring this number, you get a person"	"Log a ticket in the portal"
Run it or resell it?	"We run it", or a clear escalation path	No clear answer
During an outage?	Failover, notification, status page	"We don't have outages"
Who owns my numbers?	"You do. Port any time."	Fees or confusion
Can I leave?	Month to month or clear exit terms	Long lock-ins

■ Suggested scorecard weighting

- Answers quickly: **25%**
- Knows your setup: **20%**
- Owns the problem: **20%**
- Explains plainly: **15%**
- Tells you first: **10%**
- A contract you can leave: **10%**

The rule for AI in support

AI handles the simple and repetitive. A person handles anything urgent, unusual or emotional. **There is always a quick, obvious way to reach that person.**

Price is not on the scorecard

Compare price once you have a shortlist of providers you would trust. A slightly cheaper plan from a provider you cannot reach is **rarely cheaper by the end of the year.**