BUSINESS

Real Estate Inquiries Going Unanswered: 3 Fixes for Agents

Many buyer inquiries by website form and phone never reach an agent. I show the numbers, a 20-minute test for your own site, and three fixes.

By **Ali** 21 November 2026 18 min read

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Many inquiries, few replies

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If you are a real estate agent, many buyer inquiries by website form or phone never turn into a conversation with an agent. In a Pied Piper study of local offices of big brands, 68% of website inquiries got no reply within a day. You can check your own site in 20 minutes, then close the gap with three fixes.

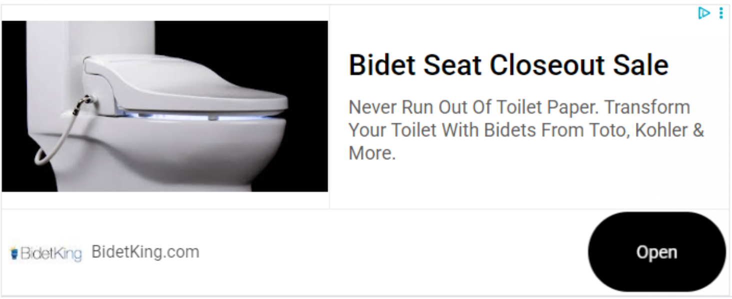
Picture yourself at a showing while a form from another buyer lands in an inbox nobody opens until tomorrow. That buyer knows nothing about your busy day. All they see is an unanswered question. Below I show the numbers, how to test your own office, and the rules you can write down today, including for chat automation, meaning a program that replies without a person typing.

SHORT ANSWER

- In a Pied Piper study of local offices of big brands, 68% of website inquiries got no reply within 24 hours, and on the phone only 33% ended with a conversation with an agent.
- You can test your own site in 20 minutes: send the form and call from a number your team does not know, write down the times, and repeat three times at different hours.
- The three fixes: make sure forms and calls really reach a person, give every inquiry one named owner, and write down when automated chat must hand the conversation to a human.
- The claim that "buyers choose the first agent who replies" is not in the NAR reports I could open, so do not use it as a fact.

How many real estate inquiries go unanswered?

A lot, at least at local offices of big brands. Pied Piper, a research firm that judges service from the customer's side, sent more than 2,000 inquiries by phone and website form to those offices. The results were reported by Real Estate News and by Florida Realtors, the news site of an association of agents in Florida, in the United States.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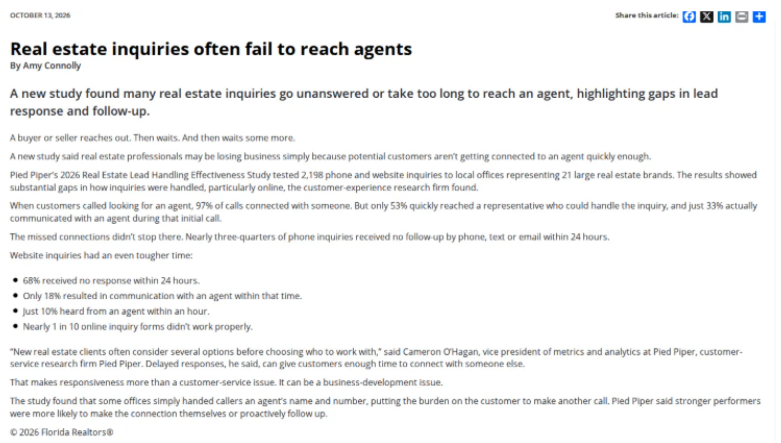

OCTOBER 13, 2026

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Real estate inquiries often fail to reach agents

By Amy Connolly

A new study found many real estate inquiries go unanswered or take too long to reach an agent, highlighting gaps in lead response and follow-up.

A buyer or seller reaches out. Then waits. And then waits some more.

A new study said real estate professionals may be losing business simply because potential customers aren't getting connected to an agent quickly enough.

Pied Piper's 2026 Real Estate Lead Handling Effectiveness Study tested 2,198 phone and website inquiries to local offices representing 21 large real estate brands. The results showed substantial gaps in how inquiries were handled, particularly online, the customer-experience research firm found.

When customers called looking for an agent, 97% of calls connected with someone. But only 53% quickly reached a representative who could handle the inquiry, and just 33% actually communicated with an agent during that initial call.

The missed connections didn't stop there. Nearly three-quarters of phone inquiries received no follow-up by phone, text or email within 24 hours.

Website inquiries had an even tougher time:

- 68% received no response within 24 hours.
- Only 18% resulted in communication with an agent within that time.
- Just 10% heard from an agent within an hour.
- Nearly 1 in 10 online inquiry forms didn't work properly.

"New real estate clients often consider several options before choosing who to work with," said Cameron O'Hagan, vice president of metrics and analytics at Pied Piper, customer-service research firm Pied Piper. Delayed responses, he said, can give customers enough time to connect with someone else.

That makes responsiveness more than a customer-service issue. It can be a business-development issue.

The study found that some offices simply handed callers an agent's name and number, putting the burden on the customer to make another call. Pied Piper said stronger performers were more likely to make the connection themselves or proactively follow up.

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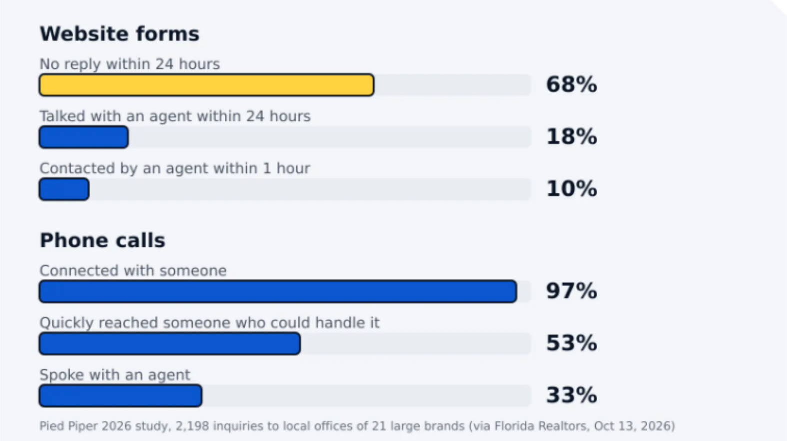
Screenshot: the Florida Realtors news article on real estate inquiries that often fail to reach agents (Source: Florida Realtors)

Here are the details. The study sent 2,198 consumer inquiries to local offices of 21 big brands in June and July 2026. Each inquiry was scored on the speed and quality of the first reply and the follow-up within 24 hours. The scoring used a Lead Handling Effectiveness score from 0 to 100, which in plain words measures how well an office deals with the inquiries it receives. These details come from Real Estate News, a news outlet.

For website inquiries, 68% got no reply within 24 hours. Only 18% led to a conversation with an agent, and only 10% were contacted by an agent within 1 hour. About 1 in 10 forms did not work at all. For phone inquiries, 97% connected, but only 53% quickly reached a representative, and only 33% ended with a conversation with an agent. Back on the phone side, 73% of phone inquiries got no follow-up by phone, text, or email within 24 hours.



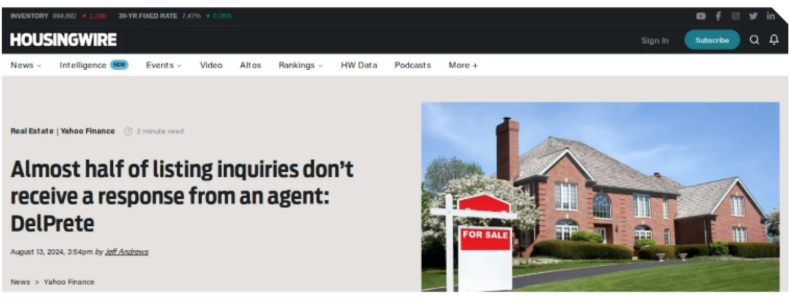
Pied Piper 2026 study, 2,198 inquiries to local offices of 21 large brands (via Florida Realtors, Oct 13, 2026)

Website and phone inquiries to local offices of big brands. (Data: Pied Piper study as reported by Florida Realtors; chart by TechUpsider)

Real Estate News also wrote down the average scores: 11 out of 100 for websites and 30 out of 100 for phones. Cameron O'Hagan of Pied Piper said, "Too often, our study found calls unanswered or follow-up delayed."

Three cautions apply. First, these numbers belong to local offices of 21 big brands, not individual agents, so do not read "68%" as your own fate. Second, Pied Piper's press release does not state the sample size or period, so I took those from the news report. Third, the study does not say why each inquiry went unanswered.

A second approach shows the problem is not imaginary. DelPrete, in a HousingWire piece dated August 13, 2024, sent "secret shoppers" to test 100 times through each brokerage's own website, not through a portal like Zillow. A secret shopper is a person who pretends to be an ordinary buyer to see how an office reacts. The tests covered more than 25 brokerages, 2 to 3 times each, during working hours on weekdays. What he recorded was whether anyone replied and how long it took. The HousingWire headline about the results says that almost half of listing inquiries do not receive a response from an agent. A brokerage is the firm an agent works under.



Real Estate | Yahoo Finance 2 minute read

Almost half of listing inquiries don’t receive a response from an agent: DelPrete

August 13, 2024, 3:54pm by Jeff Andrews

News > Yahoo Finance

Screenshot: the HousingWire article on DelPrete's secret shopper test (Source: HousingWire)

Both the DelPrete and Pied Piper methods look from the buyer's side, and they are the basis for the 20-minute test below.

Why does reply speed matter?

The evidence is weaker than what usually circulates. Start with the most famous source. Harvard Business Review (HBR) published "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads" in March 2011. A lead here means a prospective buyer who has left their contact details. The HBR page I could open shows only a teaser, with one official sentence: "Our research shows that most companies are not responding nearly fast enough." The numbers are not on that page.

I take the numbers from a summary by Reply Intelligence Group, so their status is secondary. According to that summary, an analysis of 1.25 million leads from 29 B2C and 13 B2B companies in the United States found the following. Contacting a lead within 1 hour made a meaningful conversation with a decision maker nearly 7 times more likely than waiting one more hour. Compared with waiting 24 hours or more, the gap was more than 60 times. This data is not specific to real estate, and I could not open the full HBR text.

Now data specific to property, from the National Association of Realtors (NAR), the agents' association in the United States. NAR's 2026 profile of home buyers and sellers, covering transactions from July 2025 to June 2026, reports that 90% of buyers used an agent or broker. In a NAR article dated November 10, 2026, buyers rated agent responsiveness highly: 74% valued property information and communication by text, and 73% valued personal phone calls about progress. In other words, buyers do expect active communication from their agent.

What I did not find is the claim that "buyers choose the first agent who replies". It does not appear in NAR's 2025 Top 10, its 2026 Top 10, or the NAR article of November 10, 2026. The claim may be true, but it is not proven in the NAR reports I could open, so I do not state it as fact. In my view, buyers' appreciation of communication is reason enough to reply quickly.

One more thing: the share of inquiries that arrive outside working hours. I found no primary source from NAR, Zillow, or Realtor.com for that figure. The "60 to 70%" number repeats across vendor blogs with no traceable source, so I do not use it. The most direct way to know your own office is to test it.

How can you test it yourself in 20 minutes?

You act as a secret shopper for your own office. Twenty minutes is your active work: preparing, sending, and writing things down. Waiting for replies can take longer, so check back later. DelPrete and Pied Piper provide the basis: send through the website and by phone, then record the reply. Repeating three times at different hours is my own addition, because DelPrete tested only during weekday working hours.

1. Get a phone number and an email address your team does not know, for example from a relative who is willing to help. That way your team treats you like an ordinary buyer.
2. Pick one listing that is live on your site. Write one real question, such as whether the home is still available and when it can be seen.
3. Send that question through the form on your site. Write down the send time on paper or on your phone.
4. Call your office from the unknown number. Write down the call time, who answered, and how long you waited until someone who could actually help came on the line.
5. Write down the first reply: when it arrived, whether it came from a person or was automatic, and whether it answered your question or only said "thank you".
6. Check whether any follow-up came afterwards, such as another message or a call back.
7. Repeat steps 2 to 6 three times at different hours. For example, once on a weekday morning, once in the evening, and once at the weekend.

Use a notes table like this, one sheet per attempt.

What to note	Form test	Phone test
Start time	Time the form was sent	Time the call began
First reply	Time it came, person or automatic	Who answered, how long you waited
Content of the answer	Answered, or only "thank you"	Answered, or only took a note
Follow-up	Any message within a day?	Any call back?

After three attempts you can see which hours have a gap and which path is weakest, the form or the phone. Then tell your team it was a test. The goal is to fix the path, not to find someone to blame. If the phone number on your site is not yet tappable on a visitor's phone, our article on why your website is not getting calls explains how.

What are the three fixes for unanswered inquiries?

The fixes go from basic to advanced: make sure the inquiry arrives, decide who holds it, then write down when the machine stops and a person takes over. Do not jump to the third before the first two are done.

Fix 1: make sure forms and phone calls really reach a person

Start with the simplest question: does a message from the form really land in an inbox that someone reads? According to Real Estate News, about 1 in 10 forms in the Pied Piper study did not work. Such a form looks normal to the visitor, but the message never arrives.

If your test got no reply at all, check the following one by one.

- The email address that receives the form still belongs to an active person, not to a staff member who has left.
- The message is not stuck in a spam folder or a full inbox.
- There is a notification on the phone of the person on duty, not only an email opened on an office computer.
- The phone number on your site, on your listings, and on your Google profile is the same and still active.
- A call that goes unanswered has a backup, for example forwarding to a second number or to a voicemail someone actually checks.

An inquiry lost to a broken form leaves no trace. That is why the first fix must be a real test, not trust that the form works.

Fix 2: one named owner and an honest first reply

Give every inquiry one named owner, and set up an honest automatic first reply. A named owner means a name, not "the team". If agent A is out at a showing, agent B or an office staff member holds the inquiry. Write the duty rota down, so nobody assumes someone else has replied.

An automatic first reply does not need to be clever. It must be honest about when a person will reply. For example: "Thank you, your question has arrived. Rina from our office will reply before 12 noon today." If the inquiry comes in at night, write the time of the reply the next morning, and never promise what you cannot keep.

What should the reply target be? That is your own choice. I do not give one number of minutes as a research result, because I found none that is specific to real estate agents. Pick a target you can truly meet, write it down, and measure it with the same test every month. In my view, a target you always meet is more honest and more useful than a tight one you never meet.

If your buyers prefer to message on WhatsApp, our guide to WhatsApp auto reply shows how to set it up.

Fix 3: a human handoff, with a written rule

If you use automated chat, write down the handoff rule. A handoff is the moment the chat stops answering and a human takes over the conversation. Florida Realtors wrote about this in an article on AI mortgage tools, meaning tools for the loans people take to buy a home. The article summarizes an opinion piece in HousingWire: automated tools must do more than contact leads quickly.

The summary names two risks. A generic chatbot can miss the real concern, for example a buyer who asks whether to wait for rates to fall when the real worry is the monthly payment. It can also overstep on disclosures, licensing, and consent. Loan guidance should be addressed by a licensed professional. The context is mortgages, not agents, but the handoff principle carries over. Another Florida Realtors guide, from the snippet I could read, advises writing a handoff rule for every repeating workflow, with a clear mark of where the AI stops and a person takes responsibility.

Here is my own suggestion, not an official standard. Adapt it to your office and ask a licensed professional where you live.

Chat may answer	Must go to a person
Office hours and how to reach the office	Price negotiation and terms
Listing facts you filled in yourself	Questions about loans and payments
When someone will reply	Legal and paperwork questions

Noting a request for a showing	Buyers who are anxious, upset, or confused

Three rules complete the table. First, the chat may use only the facts you gave it, and must not guess. Second, if a question falls in the right-hand list, the chat says plainly that a person will reply and names the time. Third, one named person receives the handoff and has clear working hours. A Cotality survey from May 2026, according to Florida Realtors' summary, found that more than half of US buyers prefer to handle a mortgage with a person, and two thirds prefer human help for legal matters.

What does not fix it?

Three moves that people often try do not close the gap. First, spending more on ads or buying more leads without closing the reply gap. If the inquiries you already have go unanswered, extra inquiries only add to the unanswered pile. Second, setting up automatic messages with no handoff. That message sends a "thank you" and disappears, and the buyer waits for a person who never comes.

Third, quoting a number with the wrong origin. The "21 times" figure (replying within 5 minutes versus 30 minutes) is often said to come from HBR. The Reply Intelligence Group summary says it is not from HBR but from a vendor study in 2007. Do not credit it to HBR.

I also do not use any "effectiveness per minute" table from a blog, because such tables have no traceable source. The two datasets above, the 1.25 million leads and the Pied Piper study, must not be mixed either, since they measure different things in different groups.

Is automated chat allowed to answer real estate inquiries?

The answer depends on your country and the kind of message. This section uses United States law as an example. It is general information, not legal advice, so ask a lawyer about the rules where you work.

In the United States, a law called the TCPA governs automated calls and texts to consumers. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a ruling on February 8, 2024, stating that the TCPA's limits on an "artificial or prerecorded voice" cover AI technologies that generate human voices. Such calls require the prior express consent of the person called, outside emergencies and other exceptions. This is a confirmation of the rule, not a blanket ban. Our article on Google's AI calling businesses covers another side of automated voices.

The consent rules for automated messages have changed before and are still moving. According to a summary by the law firm Morrison Foerster, the Eleventh Circuit court of appeals on January 24, 2025 vacated the FCC's one-to-one consent rule. The older written-consent rules remain in force. According to a summary by the law firm Nelson Mullins, the FCC adopted new rules on revoking consent on September 30, 2026. Among other things, they say that revoking consent for informational messages applies only to that category, while revoking consent for marketing covers all marketing from the same caller. I have not confirmed the effective date on fcc.gov, so I do not state one.

Before an automated chat or call contacts a buyer, ask a lawyer what consent you need to collect and how to record its withdrawal. Also design a clear way out, such as replying "stop".

Should you do it yourself or hand it over?

You can do fixes 1 and 2 yourself today. Fix 3 as well, as long as you write the rule and someone owns it. We at TechUpsider also sell a Chat AI & lead service, so if you would rather not spend your evenings on this, we build and run it for you. You are free to choose anyone. These five criteria apply to any provider, including us.

1. **Who owns the reply.** A named person must hold every inquiry, not only a program.
2. **A written handoff.** The provider should show where the chat stops and a person takes over, and which questions always go to a person.
3. **Text and call consent.** Ask how consent is collected and withdrawn in your country, and who is responsible if the rules change.
4. **You can test it yourself.** You should be able to send the form and call as a secret shopper and see the result without the provider's help.
5. **Reply time reports.** Ask for a record of how long each inquiry waited for a first reply and how many reached a person.

If a provider cannot answer even one of these five, ask more before you sign. Do not trust a promise of a fixed number of extra inquiries from anyone, including us.

Summary

Many buyer inquiries never reach an agent or are answered late, at least at the local offices of big brands that Pied Piper studied. Check your own office with the 20-minute test, then make three fixes: make sure forms and calls reach a person, name one owner with an honest first reply, and write a handoff rule if you use automated chat. I found no proof in the NAR reports that the first reply decides which agent a buyer picks, so you set your own target and measure it yourself.

If you want buyer replies handled without spending your evenings on it, we set it up and run it. See our Chat AI & lead service or book a free consultation, and you leave with clear next steps for your office.

Frequently asked questions

How long should it take a realtor to respond?

I found no number of minutes that is proven for real estate agents in the material I read. NAR records that buyers value agent communication but gives no time limit. In my view, pick a target you can truly meet and measure it every month with the secret shopper test.

How fast should a realtor respond to a lead?

As fast as you can honestly keep up. In general sales research, not specific to real estate, contacting a lead within 1 hour made a meaningful conversation nearly 7 times more likely than waiting one more hour, according to the Reply Intelligence Group summary. In real estate, Pied Piper found only 10% of website inquiries were contacted by an agent within 1 hour.

What is speed to lead?

Speed to lead is the time between a lead arriving and the first reply from a person. A lead is a prospective buyer who has left their contact details, for example through a form. According to the summaries I read, a shorter gap means a higher chance of a conversation.

What do speed to lead statistics show?

The most quoted statistics come from an analysis of 1.25 million leads (nearly 7 times within 1 hour, more than 60 times compared with 24 hours or more). A separate audit of 2,241 US companies found 37% replied within 1 hour, 23% never replied, and the average reply came after 42 hours. Both are secondary and not specific to real estate, and they must not be mixed.

How do you reply to a real estate inquiry?

Reply with an answer to the question, name the person who will hold the conversation, and say when that person will get in touch. If the first reply is automatic, say so and say when a person will reply. Questions about loans, legal matters, or price go to a person or a licensed professional.

How do you follow up with real estate leads?

Decide who follows up, when, and by what channel, then write down the result. Pied Piper reported that 73% of phone inquiries got no follow-up within 24 hours, so recording who follows up is a sensible first step. Florida Realtors says automated follow-up helps keep contact with leads who are hard to reach, in a mortgage context.

Why is a real estate agent not responding to emails?

The Pied Piper study scored phone calls and website forms, not email, so I have no figure specific to email. From that data, all I can state is that about 1 in 10 forms did not work. In my view, other common causes are mail landing in an inbox nobody opens, or nobody being assigned to it.

Can an AI chatbot work for real estate agents?

It can, provided there is a handoff to a person. Florida Realtors, summarizing a HousingWire opinion piece, says generic chatbots can miss the real concern and must pass the conversation to a person at the right moment. The context is mortgages, but the principle carries over. Also check the consent rules in your country.

How do you get quality leads in real estate?

The material I read does not cover how to get quality leads, so I do not claim one method. What is measurable is that leads already coming in often go unanswered: 68% had no reply within 24 hours on websites. In my view, closing the reply gap first makes every lead you get more valuable.

What should a real estate website contact form include?

The material I read gives no list of fields proven to work best. In my view, a name, a phone number or email, and the question are enough, plus a message after sending that says when a person will reply. What matters more is that the form works: about 1 in 10 forms in the Pied Piper study did not.

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