NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEWMIND RESEARCH · BENCHMARK REPORT 09

SPEED-TO-LEAD BENCHMARK 2026

How fast companies answer a new lead, what the published research links to speed, what buyers say they want, what fast cover costs, the US, EU and French rules on calls, emails and AI replies, and the playbooks and worksheets to act on it.

Edition 1
Desk-research edition

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Page numbers refer to the full report.

CHAPTER 01

About this edition

This is Edition 1 of the NEWMIND Speed-to-Lead Benchmark. It is a desk-research edition: it contains no survey data and no client data. It is built on a practitioner journal study, official statistics, official legal texts, analyst releases and vendors' own published audits, each fetched, saved and checked for this edition.

Desk-research edition · October 2026

What this edition contains

- **Part A, the market**: the Harvard Business Review audit of 2,241 US companies[1], a decade of vendor audits (tagged 'vendor claim') and Eurostat data on CRM, website chat and AI use by EU enterprises.
- **Part B, value and buyers**: what the published studies link to the first hour and the first minutes, and what buyers say about reps, relevance and unknown numbers.
- **Part C, a transparent cost model**: loaded US wage rates, the cost of coverage and first touches, and break-even deal counts, labelled 'Market research model · based on published benchmarks'.
- **Part D, the rules**: US federal and state rules on calls, texts, emails and bots, and EU and French rules on consent, canvassing and AI disclosure.
- **Part E, 10 playbooks**: measure your own response time, route every lead in real time, write a first reply that is fast and relevant, call inside the first hour, follow up with a planned cadence, cover the hours when leads arrive, automate the first touch, keep people for the conversation, protect rep time for new leads, capture consent on the form, run a monthly speed-to-lead review.
- **Part F, the toolkit**: 2 scenario grids (the cost of covering the hours, the cost of first touches by role) and 12 blank worksheets (response-time mystery-shop log, lead-routing map, first-reply script builder, call-attempt log, follow-up cadence planner, lead arrival heat map, automation and disclosure checklist, rep capacity plan, consent and opt-out audit, monthly review scorecard, speed-to-lead tool comparison, 90-day plan).

What it does not contain yet

No original survey data and no mystery-shop results. Edition 1 is desk research. NEWMIND did not submit test leads for this edition; every response-time figure comes from a named, cited publisher.

Who it is for

Heads of sales, revenue operations, marketing and customer service teams who receive inbound leads from web forms, chat, email or phone.

You will recognise these signals

- Web leads wait hours for a first reply
- Leads are checked in batches, not routed instantly
- Marketing spend grows but meetings do not

What to measure

- First response time by channel
- Share answered the same hour and the same day
- Follow-up attempts and cadence
- Routing rules and hand-offs
- Lead-to-meeting conversion by response time

How to read the numbers

- **Market figures** carry a numbered source and the population they describe. Where sources disagree, each is shown and named, never averaged.
- **Vendor figures** are tagged 'vendor claim'. They are not independently verified and are never used as model inputs.
- **Models** are transparent: every formula and input is printed so you can replace it with your own data.
- **Currency**: US dollars throughout.
- **Rules** are summarised as published on the date captured. Nothing in this report is legal advice.

From benchmark to your numbers

A NEWMIND feasibility audit measures your own inbound channels in 1–2 weeks and delivers:

- Your response times vs the HBR reference
- Pipeline value lost to slow response, modelled on your volume
- Instant routing and reply design with AI qualification
- Playbook for the first 24 hours of every lead

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CHAPTER 02

Executive summary

The published evidence points one way: answering a new lead within the hour is linked to far more conversations with decision makers, yet most companies audited answer later or not at all. The fix is rarely more staff. It is instant routing, a useful first reply, a short follow-up cadence and rules-aware calling.

37%
of 2,241 audited US companies responded to a web lead within an hour [1]

42 h
average response time among audited US companies that responded within 30 days [1]

23%
of audited US companies never responded [1]

Ten findings

01 Most US companies miss the first hour

In the Harvard Business Review audit of 2,241 US companies, 37% responded to a web test lead within an hour, 16% within one to 24 hours, 24% took more than 24 hours and 23% never responded [1].

02 The average reply took more than a day

Among the audited US companies that responded within 30 days, the average response time was 42 hours [1]. Companies that never answered are not in that average.

03 The first hour is linked to far more qualified leads

In a separate study of 1,250,000 leads at 29 B2C and 13 B2B US companies, firms that tried to contact a lead within an hour were nearly 7 times as likely to qualify it as those that tried an hour later, and more than 60 times as likely as those that waited 24 hours or longer [1]. This is an association, not proof of cause.

04 Vendor audits show the gap has not closed

InsideSales.com reported an average of 38.35 hours across the 4,723 companies in its 2016 audit [2] VENDOR CLAIM. In Workato's 2026 test of demo requests to 114 B2B companies, just 31% responded by phone; among those that called, the first call took 14 hours 29 minutes on average and only 42% called within the hour [3] VENDOR CLAIM.

05 Many leads get no answer at all

Besides the 23% of US companies in the HBR audit that never responded [1], nearly 30% of the B2B software companies in Chili Piper's demo-request study never responded [4] VENDOR CLAIM.

06 In chat, minutes matter

In Entagl's 2026 study of 32,581 customer conversations across 1,247 businesses in 9 countries, conversations answered within 60 seconds converted at 35.1%, against 12.2% at 5 to 60 minutes and 7.1% at 1 to 24 hours [5] VENDOR CLAIM.

07 Buyers want fewer rep calls, not slower answers

Gartner reports that 67% of B2B buyers state they prefer a rep-free experience [6], and that 45% of 646 B2B buyers surveyed in 2025 used AI during a recent purchase [6]. A fast first reply has to be useful on its own, not only a request for a call.

08 Unknown numbers often go unanswered

Eight in ten US adults said they don't generally answer their cellphone when an unknown number calls, in a 2020 Pew Research Center survey of 10,211 US adults [7]. The phone call works best as a follow-up to a written reply, not as the only channel.

09 Fast first touches cost less than one deal

At 500 leads a month and 10 rep minutes each, first touches cost about $56,700 a year at the loaded US wholesale sales representative rate [8,9]. With a $10,000 deal, 0.47 extra won deals a month cover it (NEWMIND model).

10 The rules on calls and AI replies tightened in 2026

The EU AI Act has applied since 2 August 2026, including the duty to tell people they are interacting with an AI system [10]. In France, phone canvassing of consumers moves to opt-in from 11 August 2026 [11]. In the US, the Telemarketing Sales Rule limits telemarketing calls to the hours between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. at the called person's location [12].

What to do on Monday

1. Submit test leads through every channel and time the replies (full report, chapter 66).
2. Map who receives each lead and how fast (full report, chapter 67).
3. Write a first reply that is useful on its own (full report, chapter 56).
4. Price first touches and coverage with your own volumes (full report, chapter 34).
5. Check your consent and calling-hour rules before you speed up calls (full report, chapter 62).

CHAPTER 03

How fast US companies answer a web lead

The most quoted lead-response audit was published in the Harvard Business Review in March 2011. The authors audited 2,241 US companies, measuring how long each took to respond to a web-generated test lead [1].

37%
of the 2,241 audited US companies responded within an hour [1]

23%
of the 2,241 audited US companies never responded [1]

42 hours
average response time, among the audited US companies that responded within 30 days [1]

Audited US companies by first response, %



Source: Harvard Business Review audit of 2,241 US companies [1]. Shares are of audited companies, not of leads.

What the split says

Of the 2,241 audited US companies, 37% responded within an hour, 16% within one to 24 hours, 24% took more than 24 hours and 23% never responded at all [1]. Nearly half of the audited companies either waited more than a day or never answered.

The 42-hour average applies only to the audited US companies that responded within 30 days [1]. Companies that never responded are not in that average, so it flatters the group as a whole (NEWMIND analysis).

The audit is from 2011. It sets the baseline the later vendor audits compare against; it does not describe 2026 practice. Part A reads the later audits against it chapter by chapter.

How to read this audit

- It measures response to one test lead per company, not each company's average over many leads.
- Response means any first contact; the article does not grade its quality.
- The population is US companies only. Nothing in it describes EU or French practice (NEWMIND analysis).

CHAPTER 04

Why leads wait: the causes the authors name

The HBR authors do not blame slow response on effort alone. They name process causes, among them retrieving leads from CRM systems' databases daily rather than continuously, sales forces focused on generating their own leads, and rules for distributing sales leads among agents and partners [1].

CAUSE NAMED BY THE AUTHORS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN 2026	FIRST CHECK
CRM leads pulled daily, not continuously [1]	A nightly import or a manual export from the form tool	Time stamp of form submit against time stamp of CRM record
Sales forces focused on their own leads [1]	Inbound leads compete with outbound targets in the same day	Who owns an inbound lead in the first hour
Rules for distributing leads among agents and partners [1]	Round-robin queues, territory rules and partner hand-offs	Number of hand-offs before the first touch

Middle and right columns: NEWMIND analysis.

Three delays, one clock

A lead waits in three places: before anyone sees it (the data delay), before anyone owns it (the routing delay) and before the owner acts (the work delay). Most teams measure only the last one (NEWMIND analysis).

The first two are system delays. They are cheap to remove and do not need more staff: a webhook in place of a batch import, and a routing rule that assigns an owner at submit time (NEWMIND analysis).

The third is a staffing question, covered in Part C, with labour costs from official US statistics.

Self-check

- Can you name, for yesterday's last inbound lead, the minute it arrived, the minute it was assigned and the minute it was touched?
- Does any lead source arrive in a batch (file, daily sync, shared inbox)?
- Is there one owner per lead within a minute of submit, by rule rather than by hand?

CHAPTER 05

A decade of vendor audits: InsideSales.com

InsideSales.com (later XANT), a sales-software vendor, ran repeated audits that submit a lead through a company's web form and time the reply. Its figures are vendor research VENDOR CLAIM and are never inputs to the NEWMIND model.

AUDIT, AS PUBLISHED	POPULATION STATED BY THE VENDOR	AVERAGE FIRST RESPONSE
With AA-ISP, published 11 May 2012	Vendor audit data from the five years to 2012 (sample size not stated)	nearly 47 hours VENDOR CLAIM [13]
Dreamforce 2014	Dreamforce 2014 participants	61 hours and 1 minute VENDOR CLAIM [14]
Dreamforce 2015	Dreamforce 2015 participants	37 hours and 25 minutes VENDOR CLAIM [14]
Published 20 October 2016	4,723 companies' web forms	38.35 hours, against 36.26 hours in a similar set of audits the year before VENDOR CLAIM [2]

How many companies were audited

The vendor reports audit counts of 3,068 companies in 2012, 5,257 in 2013 and 14,061 in 2014 VENDOR CLAIM [15]. The samples are large, but they are drawn by the vendor, from companies with working web forms, and the method is not peer reviewed.

What the series shows, and what it does not

Across the vendor's own audits the average first response stays in the range of one and a half to two days, from nearly 47 hours, the vendor's average across five years of its data to 2012, to 38.35 hours in the 2016 audit VENDOR CLAIM [13,2]. The 2016 figure rose against the year before VENDOR CLAIM [2].

Different years used different samples (conference participants, a general audit), so the series is not a like-for-like trend line. Read it as a repeated snapshot: slow response persisted while software to automate it was widely sold (NEWMIND analysis).

Conflict of interest

InsideSales.com sold software that speeds up response. Its audits support its own sales case. NEWMIND quotes them because they are the longest public series, tagged as vendor claims, and does not use them in any calculation.

CHAPTER 06

The 2016 audit of 4,723 companies

In the 2016 audit the vendor submitted leads to 4,723 companies' web forms and tracked calls, voicemails and emails VENDOR CLAIM [2].

38.35 h
average response time for the 4,723 audited companies
VENDOR CLAIM
[2]

7.7%
of leads received a response within 5 minutes, in the same audit
VENDOR CLAIM
[2]

28.4%
of first email responses were automated, in the same audit
VENDOR CLAIM
[2]

Three readings

Only 7.7% of leads in the 2016 audit received a response within 5 minutes VENDOR CLAIM [2]. The five-minute mark is the vendor's own best-practice line, not a regulatory or academic standard.

28.4% of first email responses in that audit were automated VENDOR CLAIM [2]. An automated email answers the clock, but it is not a conversation. The audit does not say how many of those automated emails led to a call.

The average of 38.35 hours compares with 36.26 hours in a similar set of audits the year before VENDOR CLAIM [2]. The vendor's sample changed between years, so the direction is indicative only (NEWMIND analysis).

What to copy from the method

- Submit a real test lead through each public form, once a week, at different hours.
- Log every channel that answers: call, voicemail, email, text, chat.
- Record the first human touch separately from the first automated touch (NEWMIND analysis).

CHAPTER 81

Sources

Each entry gives the date that applies to it: when a law was adopted or came into force, when a document was published, or, for live web pages and datasets, when it was accessed (9 October 2026). Figures quoted are short, attributed and linked; no paywalled tables and no third-party charts are reproduced.

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END OF SAMPLE

Get the full report

This sample includes the cover, contents, about page, executive summary, the Harvard Business Review audit and its causes, the InsideSales.com audits and the sources cited in them. The full report continues with broken forms, the 2026 and 2022 vendor audits, a myth check, EU data on CRM, chat and AI, what speed is worth and what buyers want, the NEWMIND cost model, US, EU and French rules, ten playbooks and the toolkit of scenario grids and worksheets.

Full report

newmindpartners.com/benchmark-speed-to-lead.html#report

NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEXT STEP

TURN THIS BENCHMARK INTO MORE MEETINGS FROM THE SAME LEADS.

You now know what is published on response times and what a fast first touch costs. NEWMIND PARTNERS measures how fast your team really answers, then designs, builds and tests the routing and replies that close the gap.

01

Feasibility audit

In 1–2 weeks we submit test leads through your inbound channels and measure first response time, routing, follow-up attempts and cadence, with read-only access to your CRM data. Then we compare the options on the market, off-the-shelf or custom.

02

Design

We design instant routing, a first reply with AI qualification and a first-24-hours playbook around your team, your CRM and the rules that apply where your buyers are.

03

Build and run

Our senior engineers build the routing and replies, connect them to the tools you already use, and can run them in production with monitoring.

04

Prove it

Baseline on day one, then the measured change in response time and lead-to-meeting conversion, reported every month.

Start with a feasibility audit

Find out how long your leads wait, what that costs in pipeline, and the business case for fixing it. No commitment.

Start a feasibility audit →

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