

PHONE MENUS · AI ANSWERING · 2026

Your Phone Menu Is the Worst Part of Your Business

It greets every new customer before anyone in your business says a word. Nobody chose it deliberately, nobody has reviewed it since it was installed, and nobody has ever enjoyed it. It is also, finally, replaceable.

A menu asks the caller to translate their problem into your org chart. They are not ringing your accounts team; they are ringing because an invoice looks wrong. That single mismatch causes everything else, the wait, the wrong option, the transfer, the being asked for an account number twice. Reordering the options does not fix it, because the problem is the format. What replaces it is a conversation: the caller says what they want in their own words, and the system answers the routine questions outright, books the appointment, recognises the emergency, passes what it captured forward, and hands to a person the instant anyone asks. Menus existed because answering used to be scarce, fixed lines, one receptionist. On a cloud platform ten callers are answered at once, so the menu now rations something free while spending the thing that is not: your customer's patience.

The short version

Elapsed	What she hears	What she is doing
0:00	"Thank you for calling. Please listen carefully as our menu options have changed."	Nothing yet. Mild resignation
0:08	"For sales and new enquiries, press 1."	Is this sales? It is not really sales. It is a burst pipe
0:14	"For accounts and billing, press 2."	No
0:20	"For service and maintenance, press 3."	Maybe. Is a burst pipe maintenance? It feels more urgent than maintenance
0:27	"For all other enquiries, press 4."	She presses 3, because she has to press something
0:31	Hold music	Switches to speakerphone. Looks at the second tab
0:52	A person: "Service, this is Dan."	Explains the burst pipe
1:20	"Ah, that's emergency. I'll put you through, can I get your name and address?"	Gives them. Again

■ Also worth knowing

How menus actually get built	What that produces
Someone listed the teams on the org chart	A menu describing your internal structure, a document your customers have never seen
Options were ordered by seniority or habit, not by call volume	The thing most people ring about is frequently option four
It was recorded once, in an afternoon	The business has since changed. The menu has not
Nobody has listened to it since	Including, usually, the owner

Why it survived this long, in fairness

The menu was a good answer to a real constraint. When you had four physical lines and one receptionist, **answering was genuinely scarce**, and sorting callers before a human touched them spent that scarce resource well. On a cloud platform there is no fixed line count, ten callers can be answered on the first ring, simultaneously. **The menu now rations something that has become free, while spending the thing that has not: your customer's patience.**

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ Why are phone menus so frustrating for customers?
- ☐ Is it worth replacing an IVR with AI answering?
- ☐ Should I trust the IVR statistics I find online?
- ☐ How do I measure whether my phone menu is hurting me?
- ☐ What happens to callers using the National Relay Service?
- ☐ How long does it take to replace a phone menu with AI?
- ☐ When should a business keep its phone menu?

This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call **1300 663 222** or visit **vocphone.com/about/contact-us**.