

**How to prepare for
hurricane season
call surges.**

Summer is the busiest season for service businesses. And just as teams adjust to the faster pace, hurricane season comes along. Hurricanes aren't nice to think about but service businesses must prepare for them.



Get going even when the hurricane hits.

Hurricanes are an unfortunate reality for millions of Americans. They cause major damage to property and equipment.

As frightening as hurricanes are, hurricane call surges tend to be highly profitable periods for service businesses. The rise in demand can help your business grow fast in a matter of months. But it takes preparation to make that happen...

“Being prepared for hurricane call surges is critical for growing your business and managing the increase in demand the season brings.”

– Bethany Ripoyla, Operations Leader, AnswerForce

Only have 1 minute?

Here are 3 actionable tips.



1

Plan for call surges

Businesses along much of the Gulf and Atlantic coasts must face that hurricane call surges are part of their business. A system to manage and capitalize on them is essential.

2

Create a protocol for call surges

The systems that serve you during quieter months most likely won't cut it when demand picks up. Prepare a protocol to action so you can use the call surge to help as many customers as possible and grow your business.

3

Optimize your customer journey

A flawed customer journey crumbles during a hurricane call surge. Map out your customer journey and look for opportunities to reduce waiting times and boost efficiency for customers. Happy customers are loyal customers.

What is a call surge?

A call surge is when a business receives a sharp rise in incoming calls. There's often a change in demand between seasons, but true surges happen after major events, like hurricanes.

Call surges are obviously a good thing; they allow businesses to secure lots of customers fast. But... call surges can be stressful if your team can't handle the spike in calls.



80% of customers say the experience is as **important as its products/services**.¹



62% of customers will **share a bad customer experience** with others.²

49%

of customers left a brand in the past 12 months due to **bad customer experience**.³



^{1,2} State of the Connected Customer Report, Salesforce. ³ Consumer Expectations Report, Emplifi.

The importance of preparing for call surges.

Hurricane call surges are pretty much a given for those on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. They should be prepared for as your response is a huge factor in your business's success.

Every call matters but the importance of great customer service amplifies during a hurricane call surge. Callers are likely to be stressed and in need of urgent help.

Customers might be affected by hurricanes but so might your premises if you're in the same location. A preparedness plan to secure your premises and equipment could be a major factor in your success or failure during a hurricane call surge.

How to manage hurricane call surges.

- 1 What does a call surge look like?
- 2 Plan for who is answering calls.
- 3 Review your customer journey.
- 4 Define what the perfect phone call looks like.
- 5 Create a simple process to action after phone calls.
- 6 Train your team.

1. What does a call surge look like?

Call surges can happen in minutes. And if you don't plan for them, it's too late. All you can do is take as many calls as possible and accept you're going to miss many. Obviously, no business owner wants to be in that position!

Study your data to get an understanding of what a "normal" month looks like. Look at how many phone calls you receive, and how many jobs you book, etc. Note this information so that it's easier to spot a call surge.

You can then activate your "Plan B" once a call surge kicks in – an adjusted workflow for managing more calls.



“Having the right processes in place is how you grow your business. No one wants a hurricane, but it’s going to happen, so make sure your business is ready.”

– Bethany Ripoyla, Operations Leader, AnswerForce

How to manage hurricane call surges:

- ▶ **Extended hours:** Offer evening and weekend appointments to keep up with demand.
- ▶ **Temporary staffing:** Additional staff can be hired seasonally, or to cover while team members are on vacation so you always have a full team available.
- ▶ **Increase the number of people answering:** [24/7 answering services](#) can help you manage the influx of calls, and can often scale more quickly than finding your own team.
- ▶ **Regular status updates:** Priorities can change quickly during hurricane call surges. Instant messaging apps like WhatsApp and Slack are a great way to inform teams of urgent updates.



2. Plan for who is answering calls.

A laid-back approach can work during the quieter months but it will fall apart and cause more problems during a call surge. A robust system is essential during a hurricane call surge to capitalize on as many opportunities as possible.

- ▶ **Create a plan:** Staff should know what times they're expected to answer calls, and who to contact should they be unable to answer.
- ▶ **Have a backup plan:** Create a backup plan for phone cover as illness, vacations, and other ad-hoc events are to be expected.
- ▶ **Know where the information goes:** Once you can answer more calls, you need to know where that information is going so your team on the ground can access it quickly. Think about how it gets into a system, and automate it where you can to avoid manual data entry.
- ▶ **Encourage feedback:** Invite staff to share their feedback to fix any issues that annoy them. Hurricane call surges can be stressful, so do what you can to keep morale high.



3. Review your customer journey.

It helps to take a step back to see what customers experience. Often, the customer journey gets overlooked as teams grow and systems change. There could be room for improvement to make life easier for you and your customers.

How to review your customer journey:

- ▶ **Write out your workflow:** Review all the customer touchpoints, from initial contact to your post-service follow-up. Map it out on paper in a tool like Miro so you see the different stages involved.
- ▶ **Review feedback:** Look at your negative reviews to spot common themes that annoy customers. Some issues might stem from a flawed workflow that takes too long or confuses customers.
- ▶ **Streamline workflow:** Look for opportunities to reduce customer waiting times and boost convenience. Look for touchpoints that can be removed, combined, or simplified.
- ▶ **Special hurricane processes:** With a huge surge in calls, is there a shortened version you can use to get core information? It may not be as high on customer service, but will help both you and your customers if they just want to know they can get help fast.
- ▶ **Train staff for the new workflow:** Share your new workflow with your team to ensure everyone's following the same process.



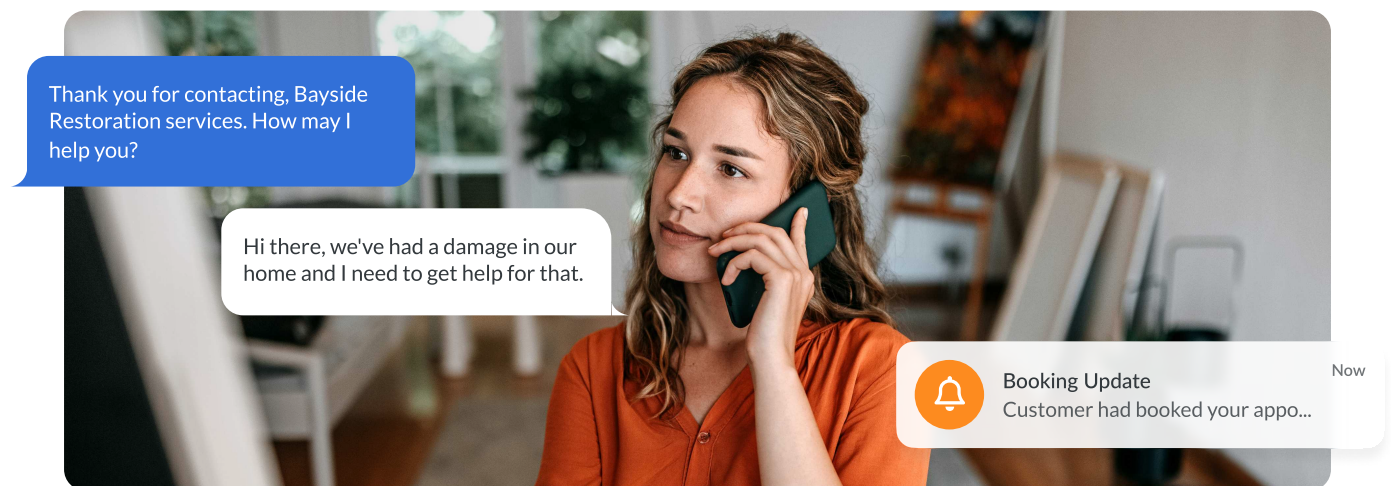
4. Define what the perfect phone call looks like.

First impressions matter for every business – especially in high-stress situations for your customers.

Emotions can be high during Hurricane Season, which makes the phone call even more important. There's an art to answering the phone. Callers should feel welcomed and cared for when they call.

How to create the perfect phone call consistently:

- ▶ **Follow scripts:** Scripts ensure you welcome callers, qualify/disqualify them, collect the right information, and proceed to the next step smoothly.



- ▶ **Create a protocol to follow:** Map out your workflows for every kind of query to make it easy for staff to direct calls to the right person/department.
- ▶ **Send confirmation:** Text/email confirmations and reminders are a great way to cap off a phone call. It puts callers' minds at ease that their details have been entered correctly and the next step is underway.
- ▶ **Document the process:** Add your phone call process to your internal training area so new members of staff can hit the ground running.

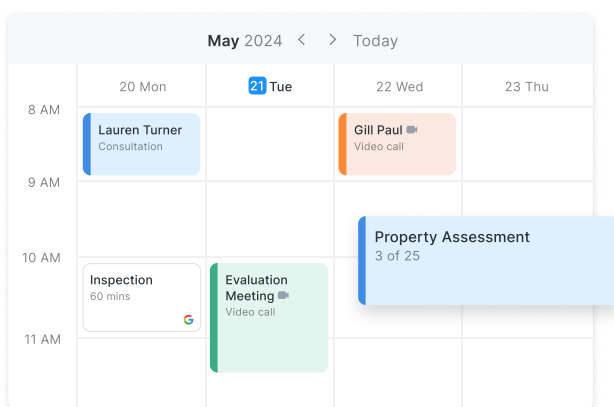
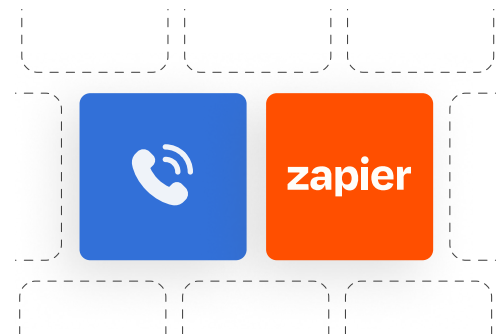
5. Create a simple process to action after phone calls.

Lots of customer information is captured on phone calls. It needs to be transferred to the right areas quickly and efficiently so everyone's on the same page.

A smooth system makes it easy for team members to focus on what they do best.

How to improve data transfer and communication:

- ▶ **Centralize information:** “One single source of truth” stamps out many problems. Your job management software is usually this source. It has all the information needed, and everyone has access to information they need.
- ▶ **Decide how you will communicate:** Set one clear way they will get job information post-hurricane. And have a back up in place, just in case.
- ▶ **Transfer call information:** This is where lots of things can go wrong. Putting in data manually takes time and - especially when it's busy - can lead to mistakes. Automate this wherever you can. Tools like [Zapier](#) are great for this.



- ▶ **Make a workflow:** Create a workflow in your job management software for every type of job. This way, you can assign a workflow to save entering all details manually. Customer communication, appointment scheduling, invoicing, and more can all be done – so you don't need to worry about forgetting key steps.

- ▶ **Collect feedback:** The customer is always right. Reviewing customer feedback helps you spot areas for improvement.

6. Train your team.

You've spent time thinking through and setting up processes, now make sure everyone knows what's going on. Bringing people along can often be the hardest part, especially if they already have their own ways of doing things.

- ▶ **Get input throughout:** Ask people at different stages of making the plan for input - make them feel like they've been part of the process.
- ▶ **Be clear on the 'why':** It's not just about your profitability, but also supporting your team during high-stress situations.
- ▶ **Make time for training:** Even if it's just 15 minutes a week over a couple of weeks. It needs to be more than five minutes and send people off to read the plan you've made.



The benefits of being prepared for hurricane call surges.

You win more jobs

Every call missed is a missed opportunity. So with more calls answered, an improved workflow, and a team equipped to handle call surges – you stand to win more jobs. This is so important for service businesses as they have a limited range of customers they can help. One new customer could be a repeat customer for years to come.

Reduce stress, improve service

Being calm, clear, and professional after a hurricane is something people remember (and they'll remember the opposite even more). Planning for huge call surges, and knowing the changes you'll make to normal processes prepares everyone. It will still be hard, but your team will be much better equipped to manage it.

Professionalism in hard times builds trust. And trust is what businesses are built on.

Boost productivity

The upside of a call surge is securing lots of jobs. The downside is that an overflow of calls can lead to lots of mistakes. Manual data entry, data conflicts, and misunderstandings quickly add up to dent productivity.

Preparing for hurricane call surges in advance helps you tighten up your systems to keep up with demand. Your entire process is likely to improve, which makes it easy for your teams to do what they do best.

Why having people answer is important.

Many businesses miss a staggering amount of phone calls or leave them to voicemail. To combat the problem, some use AI and bots as customer service tools.

You could say that's better than missing calls – do they help you provide 5-star customer service?

Why people make the difference

- ✔ Customers need to trust your business
- ✔ People can offer genuine reassurance
- ✔ Customers want to be heard
- ✔ People build trust through empathy
- ✔ People adapt to customer needs
- ✔ People want to talk to people

While AI and bots may have some role to play, it's key to remember that callers may be unable to heat their home/commercial property due to damage. So it's completely understandable that they're worried, stressed, scared.

The last thing callers want is a frustrating experience. They just want their home or equipment repaired ASAP. As you're a local business, a trained, empathetic agent can make the human connection callers will appreciate. And happy customers are one of your best sources for lead generation.

78% prefer to speak with a real person when they contact a company.

42% feel that AI is making the customer service experience worse.

15% say chatbots and AI resolve their issues every time.

Source: OnePoll, 2023



How can an answering service help?

Answer every phone call

Answering every call can feel hard enough during the quieter seasons. It can feel almost impossible during a hurricane call surge. Answering services give you the ability to answer every call 24/7, after hours, weekends, or at specific times.

They also offer customized brand scripting for your business, bilingual answering, lead capturing services, and [more](#).

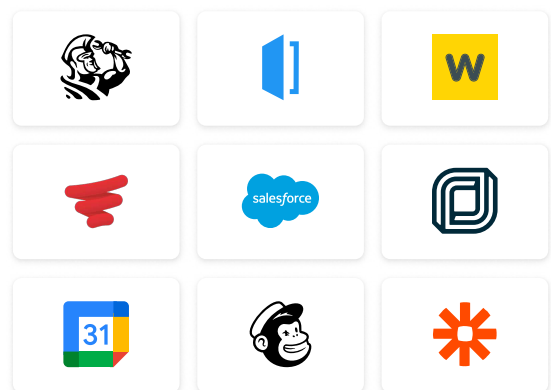


See all call information

Answering services connect to your way of working. You can view caller info, listen to calls back, or view call transcripts at any time.

Integrations

Answering services can connect with your other systems to speed up information transfer. Virtual receptionists can take calls for you, and then push information straight to your CRM. Check out our [integrations](#) page.

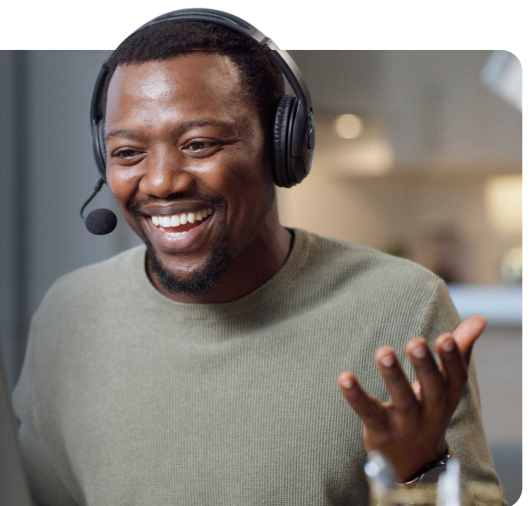


Key takeaways.

- ▶ Hurricane call surges should be prepared for to grow your service business.
- ▶ Study your metrics so call surges are easy to identify.
- ▶ Create a plan of action to adapt your workflow for call surges.
- ▶ Having real people answer the phone improves customer service, lead capture, and qualification.
- ▶ A 24/7 answering service helps you provide world-class customer service, win more jobs, and boost team productivity – even during a call surge.


Manage your call surges with AnswerForce.


[Schedule your free demo](#) today to learn how AnswerForce can scale in seconds to manage call surges for your businesses.



Connect with us.

Find out more about how our trusted 24/7 service industry solutions can support your business growth.

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