# What an AI receptionist actually costs — every pricing model, verified

> *"I keep seeing AI receptionist ads and I've no idea what's a fair price — is it $30 a month or $3,000 a month?"*

**Category:** customer-communication | **Setup Time:** ~15 minutes | **Estimated Hours Saved:** 1 hrs/week | **Direct Software Cost:** $0 / month

## SOLUTION SUMMARY

Both, and the 100× spread is real. DIY voice-AI platforms charge per minute (roughly 8–13 cents all-in once you add the provider fees), the small-business products run about $25 to $350 a month on call-capped plans, and human-backed answering services start around $300 a month for 30 calls. Every figure on this page was checked against the vendor's own pricing page on 2026-10-14 — including the call caps and overage rates the landing pages leave out.

## REQUIRED TOOLS & DIRECT WHOLESALE UTILITIES

- **Vapi:** **(Free Tier / Wholesale)**
- **Upfirst:** **(Free Tier / Wholesale)**
- **Dialzara:** **(Free Tier / Wholesale)**
- **Goodcall:** **(paid)**
- **My AI Front Desk:** **(Free Tier / Wholesale)**
- **Quo (formerly OpenPhone) + Sona:** **(paid)**
- **Smith.ai:** **(paid)**
- **Google Voice (the free baseline):** **(Free Tier / Wholesale)**

## STEP-BY-STEP APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Run your missed-call number first**
   Five minutes in your call log tells you whether you're shopping for a $15 text-back fix or actual call coverage. Most small books don't need an AI receptionist at all — the missed-call cost table on this site computes your real exposure.

2. **Pick your band**
   Per-minute DIY platforms (Vapi) if you can build and maintain an agent; call-capped SMB products ($25–$350 a month) for plug-in coverage; human-backed services ($300+ a month) when call quality matters more than call price.

3. **Check the cap and the overage, not the headline**
   Every SMB plan is capped by calls or minutes. Ask for the overage rate in writing — per-call overages and $0.35–0.48/minute cliffs are where 'from $29' becomes a surprise.

4 **Ask two gate questions before signing**

How does A2P/TCR texting registration work on this platform (human-reviewed, days of lead time on some), and does your number plus call history port out cleanly? Numbers usually port; transcripts usually don't.

5 **Pilot one month against the baseline**

Keep the cheap text-back running during the trial. The honest verdict is in your own recovered-booking count, not the vendor's dashboard.

### 5-POINT QUALITY VERIFICATION PROTOCOL

[ ] **Carrier & Webhook Test:** Confirm webhook listener receives test payload and returns HTTP 200 within 500ms.
[ ] **End-to-End Simulation:** Execute live test event from personal device and verify SMS/email delivery.
[ ] **Anti-Spam & Rate Limit Check:** Verify repeated submissions do not trigger duplicate messages to clients.
[ ] **Direct Ownership Audit:** Confirm all API keys, accounts, and credentials belong directly to your practice.
[ ] **Staff Notification Verification:** Verify practice manager/receptionist receives real-time push alert with dial link.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: Is there a free AI receptionist?**
A: A real phone number is never free. The $0 path published here is a browser voice agent inside Google Cloud's free quotas: Speech-to-Text's 60 free minutes a month, a Standard text-to-speech voice, and a free-tier Gemini model, with a cap under each quota and a $0.01 budget alert. The recipe is the zero-dollar voice agent fix, and the button is the voice agent demo. Vendor free tiers in this table are trials or starter credits. Google Voice Basic plus a missed-call text-back is still the $0 way to cover an actual phone number.

**Q: What does a '$29-a-month' plan actually include?**
A: A call cap — typically around 30 calls or a bundled minute count. Read the overage rate before the price; it's the number that decides what the plan costs in your busiest month.

**Q: AI receptionist or answering service — what's the real difference?**
A: Price and ceiling. AI products run about $25–$350 a month and handle routine calls well; human-backed services like Smith.ai start around $300 a month for 30 calls and handle the hard calls better. The deciding question is what your worst call of the month is worth.