



AUTO ATTENDANT / RESEARCH & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Sequential vs Simultaneous Ring for a Small Team

Get a business phone number with a simple auto attendant menu from Auto Attendant. A caller picks who they need and the call rings that person's own mobile, so nobody on your team has to publish a personal number.

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The short answer

Ringing everyone at once (simultaneous, or "ring all") gets a caller to a person fastest, at the cost of interrupting the whole team on every call. Ringing one person at a time (sequential, or a "hunt") keeps a clear owner for each call and leaves everyone else alone, at the cost of extra ring time at every hop. Round robin and longest idle are fairness rules for teams that share a steady stream of calls; they belong to call queues more than to a three-person shop.

For a small team whose calls land on personal mobiles, the method matters less than one detail: **each mobile's own voicemail must not answer before your routing moves on**. If it does, the call ends in a personal mailbox and nobody else gets a chance to pick up. Most of this guide is about avoiding that.

One honest caveat: we found no public study that compares answer rates between simultaneous and sequential ringing. The trade-offs below are design reasoning from how the systems are documented to behave, not measured results.

The four ring strategies in plain terms

Strategy	What happens	Also called	Best at
Simultaneous	Every phone rings at the same moment; the first to answer gets the call and the others stop	Ring all, parallel ring, attendant routing	Speed to a human
Sequential	Phone 1 rings for a set time, then phone 2, then phone 3, always in the same order	Linear hunt, serial routing, fixed order, prioritized hunt	Clear ownership, a primary person with backups
Circular	One at a time, but the starting point moves so calls spread across the team	Round robin, rotating, hunt random start	Spreading calls evenly
Longest idle	The call goes first to whoever has gone longest without a call	Longest waiting, most idle	Fairness when agents sit at a desk with a status

The underlying idea is old. The SIP standard that most internet phone systems use describes a "parallel search", where a server tries several locations without waiting for earlier attempts to finish, and a "sequential search", which tries each contact "in sequence, proceeding to the next one only after the previous has generated a final response" ([RFC 3261, section 6](#)). Every vendor feature below is a variation on those two.

How the main platforms label them

The names differ, so read the setting descriptions, not just the labels. As documented on 2026-10-28:

Platform	Simultaneous	Sequential	Circular / fairness	Notes
Microsoft Teams call queues	Attendant routing: "rings all representatives in the queue at the same time"	Serial routing: rings representatives "one by one in the order specified"	Round robin; Longest idle	Microsoft recommends round robin or longest idle and an agent alert time of at least 20 seconds (Microsoft Learn)
Google Voice ring groups	Simultaneous, with a total ring duration	Fixed order, with time per member	Round robin, which Google describes as "random order"	Up to 50 members (Google Workspace Help)
RingCentral (RingEX) call queues	Simultaneous, up to 10 members	Fixed order	Longest idle	(RingCentral support); its developer guide also lists a Rotating mode (RingCentral developer guide)
Zoom Phone call queues	Simultaneous	Sequential	Rotating, longest idle, group rotating	(Zoom blog, July 2026)
3CX ring groups and queues	Ring All	Prioritized Hunt (always starts at the top of the list)	Queues add Hunt Random Start, Round Robin, Longest Waiting and others	Ring group ring time defaults to 20 seconds (3CX manual)

Two details are worth noticing. Google's "round robin" is random, not a fixed rotation, so do not expect a strict A, B, C, A pattern. And 3CX's Prioritized Hunt always starts with the first person, which is what you want for "owner first, then backup", and not what you want for spreading calls.

Microsoft's recommendations are written for staffed queues of agents signed in to Teams with a presence status. They do not transfer neatly to a few personal mobiles that cannot report "available" or "busy".

When ringing everyone at once works best

Simultaneous ring is the strongest option when:

- **Any of several people can handle any call.** A two-person office where both can book an appointment loses nothing by letting whoever is free grab it.
- **Speed matters more than ownership.** Urgent service calls, a single receptionist role covered by whoever is around.

- **Everyone's phone behaves the same way.** All on an app, or all with personal voicemail controlled (see below).

The costs are real but manageable:

- **Interruptions.** Every call buzzes every phone. On a team of four, three people are interrupted for a call one of them takes.
- **"I thought you had it."** When a phone rings in several pockets at once, each person can assume someone else will answer. A plain team rule helps: the first person free answers, always.
- **One mailbox can win the race.** Twilio's documentation for its own simultaneous dialing warns that "a cellphone in airplane mode" or an office phone system "may pick up after a single ring, preventing the other phone numbers from ringing long enough for a human ever to answer," and that "the first call that connects will cancel all the other attempts" ([Twilio](#)). The same applies to any mobile whose voicemail answers immediately because it is off, out of coverage, or set to decline.

When ringing one at a time works best

Sequential ring fits when:

- **There is a natural first person.** The owner wants every sales call first; the helper is the backup.
- **People should not be interrupted unless needed.** A technician on a job should only hear the phone when the office cannot answer.
- **There is an on-call order.** First on call, then second, then the manager.

The cost is time. Each hop adds its full ring time before the next phone rings. Three phones at 20 seconds each is 60 seconds of ringing before voicemail, on top of any greeting or menu the caller has already heard. Many callers will hang up before the third person is ever tried. Sequential ring also inherits the voicemail problem at every hop: if the first phone's voicemail answers at second 15 while your routing planned to wait 20, the second and third people never ring.

Round robin and longest idle: fairness, not speed

Round robin and longest idle answer a different question: who should get the next call so that work is shared evenly. Microsoft describes round robin as balancing calls "so that each call representative gets the same number of calls," and longest idle as routing "to the representative who is idle the longest," based on Teams presence ([Microsoft Learn](#)). 3CX lists similar queue strategies, including Round Robin, Longest Waiting, Least Talk Time and Fewest Answered ([3CX manual](#)).

These rules shine when several people share a high volume of similar calls and sit in an app that knows whether they are free. With two or three personal mobiles, there is rarely enough volume for fairness to matter, and the system usually cannot tell "idle" from "driving". If you are at the point of needing fairness rules, hold music and a waiting line, read our comparison of [call queues](#), [ring groups](#) and [auto attendants](#).

The mobile voicemail trap

When a business number forwards to personal mobiles, each mobile still has its own carrier voicemail. From the network's point of view, a mailbox that picks up is an answered call. The routing stops there.

How fast does a mobile's voicemail answer? It varies by carrier and setting:

- **TELUS** lets customers set the delay with a dial code, in "increments of 5 seconds to a maximum of 30", and gives 20 seconds as about four rings ([TELUS support](#)). The same article notes that ring duration customization is not supported on Samsung phones.
- **Verizon** describes its no-answer forwarding as kicking in after "three or four rings" ([Verizon](#)).
- **Rogers** notes that its conditional call forwarding "will not work when voicemail is activated" ([Rogers](#)). In practice, mobile voicemail usually occupies the same no-answer, busy and unreachable slots that forwarding would use.

Three situations send a call straight to a personal mailbox, often in a second or two:

1. **Declined.** Apple's guide is explicit: "If you decline a call, it goes to voicemail" (with a note that some countries disconnect instead) ([Apple](#)). One tap of the red button by a busy person ends the hunt.
2. **Busy or unreachable.** On a call, switched off, in airplane mode or out of coverage. Carriers treat these as separate forwarding conditions; Rogers lists distinct codes for "busy", "no reply" and "not reachable" ([Rogers](#)).
3. **Screened or silenced.** Recent iPhones can screen unknown callers ("Ask Reason for Calling") or silence them and send them to voicemail ([Apple](#)). A forwarded business call that shows a customer's number your phone has never seen is exactly that kind of call. Test it.

Some platforms add a check so a person, not a mailbox, accepts the call. Google says that when a ring group call reaches a member through their carrier, "the member hears a prompt confirming someone has answered the call" ([Google Workspace Help](#)). If your service has nothing like that, the fix is in the ring times and on the phones themselves.

How long to ring each phone

These are design recommendations, not published standards:

- **Ring each mobile for less time than its own voicemail delay.** A gap of 5 seconds is a reasonable margin. If a phone's voicemail answers at 25 seconds, ring it for 20.
- **Or lengthen the mobile's delay.** Where the carrier allows it (TELUS: up to 30 seconds), set it to the maximum and keep your hop at 20.
- **Keep the first hop at 15 to 20 seconds.** Microsoft's 20-second minimum recommendation and the 20-second 3CX default point the same way: much shorter, and people miss calls while reaching for the phone.
- **Keep total ringing under about 45 to 60 seconds.** Add the hops: $3 \times 20 = 60$ seconds, $2 \times 20 = 40$, $3 \times 15 = 45$. Then add your greeting. If the sum is past a minute, drop a hop or shorten each.

- **Make the last step a shared business voicemail**, not someone's personal mailbox, so messages do not get lost on a phone that changes hands. Our page on [missed calls](#) covers what to do with them.

Decision table by team type

Team	Suggested method	Order and ring time	Why
Owner plus one helper	Sequential	Owner 20 s, helper 20 s, then voicemail (40 s total)	The owner wants first refusal; the helper only hears overflow
Two equals who both answer everything	Simultaneous, if both phones are tested; otherwise sequential	Ring both 20 to 25 s, then voicemail	Fastest answer; one untested mailbox can still steal the call
Front desk plus backup	Sequential	Desk 15 to 20 s, backup 20 s, then voicemail	Desk owns the call; backup is not interrupted when the desk is free
On-call rotation (trades, property, IT)	Sequential	First on call 20 to 25 s, second 20 s, manager 15 to 20 s	Matches the on-call order; keep total under about 60 s
Three or four sales or service staff sharing calls	Simultaneous for speed, or a rotating method if one person gets everything	20 to 25 s, then voicemail	Fairness starts to matter; consider an app with presence
Five or more people, regular overlapping calls	A real call queue	Per vendor	Callers need to wait in line rather than hit voicemail

Checklist: stop personal voicemail from taking business calls

For each phone on the route:

- ☐ Find the voicemail delay. Call the mobile from another phone, do not answer, and time it to the voicemail greeting.
- ☐ If the carrier lets you change it, set it longer than your routing ring time (or to the maximum). Ask the carrier how; codes differ.
- ☐ If the person prefers no personal voicemail at all, ask the carrier whether it can be removed, and test what callers hear afterwards.
- ☐ Agree a team rule: do not decline business calls; let them ring through.
- ☐ Check call screening and "silence unknown callers" settings, and save the business number as a contact.
- ☐ Check Do Not Disturb and Focus schedules on each phone.
- ☐ Record a personal greeting that names the business, in case a call does land there.

A ten-minute test script

Use a phone that is not on the route. Write down what you hear and when.

1. **Normal answer.** Call the business number; person 1 answers. Confirm it rang where expected.
2. **No answer.** Call again; person 1 lets it ring. Time when person 2 starts ringing. It should match your hop time, not your carrier's voicemail.
3. **Decline.** Person 1 presses decline. Does the call move to person 2, or land in person 1's voicemail?
4. **Busy.** Person 1 is on another call. Where does the new call go?
5. **Phone off.** Person 1 turns the phone off or uses airplane mode. Repeat.
6. **Nobody answers.** Everyone lets it ring. Time the total and confirm the business voicemail, not a personal one, takes the message.
7. **After hours.** Repeat step 1 outside opening hours and confirm the closed-hours behaviour.

A script for the person calling: "Hi, this is [Name] testing the phone line, test number [N], at [time]. Please ignore." Repeat the test whenever someone changes phone, carrier or settings. The [how it works](#) page shows how a keypad menu sits in front of these steps.

FAQ

What happens if two people answer a simultaneous ring at the same moment? Only one gets the call. Microsoft says the first representative to pick up gets it ([Microsoft Learn](#)), and Twilio says the first call to pick up is connected while "the rest are hung up" ([Twilio](#)). What the slower person hears depends on the system, so include it in your test.

Is sequential ring slower for the caller? When the first person is free, no. When they are not, yes: every unanswered hop adds its full ring time.

Can callers tell which method I use? Usually not. They hear ringing either way. They notice a long ring before voicemail, or a voicemail greeting with someone's personal name.

Does round robin make sense for three people? Rarely. It solves uneven workload, which needs steady volume to show up. A fixed order with an agreed backup is simpler to reason about.

Why does a call sometimes go to voicemail after one ring? Usually that mobile was off, out of coverage, busy, screening, or someone pressed decline, and the carrier's voicemail answered right away. Run the test script above.

Auto Attendant takes the sequential approach: a menu option can ring up to three phones in turn, 10 to 60 seconds each (20 by default), never simultaneously, then voicemail.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

1. <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc3261>
2. <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/aa-cq-setup-call-queue>
3. <https://knowledge.workspace.google.com/admin/voice/set-up-google-voice-ring-groups>
4. https://support.ringcentral.com/s/article/Call-Queue-Overview?language=en_US
5. <https://developers.ringcentral.com/guide/voice/call-routing/manual/call-queues>

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About Auto Attendant

Auto Attendant gives a small business one phone number and a recorded menu that sends each caller to the right person. The call rings the mobile that person already carries, using their normal dialler and their normal mobile plan. Pricing is a single flat monthly fee for the whole company rather than a charge for each user, and there is no app, desk phone or hardware to install.

One number, one menu, the phones you already own

A caller dials the business number, hears a short greeting and chooses an option. Each option can ring one mobile, ring several at once so whoever is free answers first, or try people one after another in a set order. There is no limit on how many people sit on the receiving end, because nobody is billed per seat. Setup is done by the owner in a few minutes: pick a number, write the greeting, and point each option at a mobile.

What it deliberately is not

An auto attendant routes a call; it does not answer one. Nobody at Auto Attendant speaks to callers, and no AI stands in for a receptionist. A business that wants its calls handled, messages taken and appointments booked wants an answering service, which is a different product at a different price. A business that needs call recording, queues, agent dashboards or CRM integration wants a contact centre platform. Auto Attendant is for the case where the call should simply reach the right pocket.

Keeping personal numbers off the internet

The business number is the only number a caller ever sees. Personal mobile numbers are never displayed and never given out, which is what lets an owner put a number on a website, an invoice, a van or a Google Business Profile without handing a personal line to everyone who finds it. An existing advertised number can be ported across and kept, and the old line keeps working while the port is in progress.

Work with Auto Attendant

Visit [Auto Attendant](#) to see [how it works](#), [how it compares](#) to a personal mobile, Google Voice and a full phone platform, and the current [pricing](#).

Telephone number portability, emergency calling and caller-ID rules differ by country and change over time. Articles published here describe general practice and cite primary regulator and carrier sources; they are not a guarantee of any timeline, and they are not legal or regulatory advice for a specific business.

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