

AI VOICE ASSISTANT • PLAYBOOK

THE AI RECEPTIONIST PLAYBOOK

How to build an AI voice assistant that answers your calls and makes outbound ones. Five steps, the wiring, a prompt template, a test plan and the mistakes we already made for you.

vapi
VAPI

the voice engine

twilio
Twilio

the phone number



Deepgram
speech and voice



Claude
reads every call



FastAPI
the server



React
the dashboard



SQLite
call history

ANQOR

Anqor Studios L.L.C-FZ · Dubai

WHAT YOU ARE BUILDING

One system with two jobs: answer the calls you receive, and make the calls you plan. Both share the same voice, the same facts and the same call history.

INBOUND: THE FRONT DESK

- Answers as your business, in your tone
- Answers questions from the Knowledge you wrote
- Transfers to the right department, with a spoken handover
- Takes a message when you are closed
- Keeps a transcript of every call

OUTBOUND: THE CAMPAIGN

- Calls a lead list within hard limits
- Follows a call type: sales, interview, booking, follow-up
- Detects voicemail and hangs up
- Labels every call and captures the lead
- Sends hot leads to your CRM

● RULES WE BUILT IN

ONLY WRITTEN FACTS	The assistant states only what is in the approved brief. Anything else: "I don't want to guess, the team will cover it."
NO INVENTED PROMISES	It never promises a callback day or time. It says the team will follow up.
IT SAYS IT IS AN AI	If someone asks, it tells them. It never pretends to be a person.
HANGS UP CLEANLY	After goodbye it ends the call. Every call type has a time and spend cap.
NO PAYMENTS	It cannot take payment. A "yes" means the team follows up.

NOT A receptionist replaces the repetitive part of the job, not judgment. Always give callers a way to reach a person.

GATHER THESE FIRST

An afternoon of preparation saves days of fixing. Tick each line before you open any tool.

YOU NEED	WHY
☐ A voice-AI platform account (we use VAPI)	Runs the call: it listens, thinks and speaks.
☐ A phone number from Twilio, or a local carrier over SIP	The number people dial. Local carriers are often cheaper for local calls.
☐ Your facts, written down	Services, prices (or "we confirm on a call"), availability, opening hours.
☐ Departments with direct numbers and hours	So the assistant can transfer calls to a real person.
☐ An AI model to label calls (we use Claude)	Reads each transcript: outcome, objections, contact details.
☐ Somewhere for leads to land	A CRM that accepts a webhook, or just the dashboard.
☐ Your local calling rules	Consent, recording, calling hours, caller ID and do-not-call lists differ by country.
☐ A test phone (your own)	You will make many test calls before anyone else hears it.

● WHAT IT COSTS, ROUGHLY

In our own estimates for a Nigeria line (October 2026), 100 calls of 3 minutes cost about **\$17 to \$25 in call charges**, plus about **\$4 a month per number**. That is roughly **\$0.07 to \$0.14 a minute** all in. The voice, the speech recognition and the AI model each bill separately, and prices vary a lot by country and carrier, so get a quote for yours.

TIP Start with one number, one voice and one call type. Add countries and campaigns only after the first one works.

SET UP THE FRONT DESK

The front desk is your business written down: who you are, what you offer, who answers which call.

● BUSINESS DETAILS

Your business name, what you do in one sentence, where you are, and your time zone. The assistant is also given the current local time on every call, so it knows whether you are open.

● KNOWLEDGE: WHAT IT MAY SAY

FIELD	WHAT TO WRITE	EXAMPLE
Name	The service or product, as a customer says it	"Teeth whitening"
What it is	Two sentences, plain words	"A one-hour in-clinic treatment."
Price	A real price or range, or "we confirm on a call"	"From AED 800" or "Confirmed on a call"
Availability	Days, lead time, limits	"Mon to Sat, usually within 3 days"
Never say	Things it must not promise or discuss	"Medical advice, guarantees"

● DEPARTMENTS: WHERE CALLS GO

NAME	WHEN TO SEND	NUMBER	HOURS
Sales	New enquiries, quotes	+971 5X XXX XXXX	Mon to Fri 09:00 to 18:00
Support	Existing customers with problems	+971 4 XXX XXXX	Mon to Sat 09:00 to 20:00
Accounts	Invoices and payments	+971 5X XXX XXXX	Mon to Fri 10:00 to 16:00

Numbers go in full international format (E.164): a plus sign, the country code, then the number with no spaces or zeros at the front.

TIP Write only what is true today. The assistant repeats your Knowledge word for word, so an out-of-date price becomes a promise.

PICK THE VOICE

The voice is the first impression. Choose it by listening, not by reading a list.

- 1 **Listen to three voices** reading a real sentence from your business, including your brand name. Pick the one you would trust on the phone.
- 2 **Set the language per country.** One assistant can speak English in one market and Arabic in another. Keep the call types the same and let the country decide the language.
- 3 **Fix the pronunciation of your name.** Voices mangle names. We write "Anqor" but the voice must say "Anchor", so the prompt spells it the way it should sound.
- 4 **Keep turns short.** At most two short sentences, then stop and listen. One question at a time. Long speeches make callers hang up.
- 5 **Let it end the call.** Give it an end-call action so it hangs up after goodbye, and set a maximum call time and spend. We use 5 minutes for sales calls and 15 for interviews.

● SPEECH RECOGNITION: TEST TWO ENGINES

The speech-to-text engine decides how well it hears accents and noisy lines. We compared three (Soniox, Deepgram and Grok) by placing one real test call with each and reading the transcript and delay. Do the same with your own accent and your own phone.

● SPEED

Replies took about 2 to 3 seconds in our tests on a long prompt (around 7,000 characters). Every extra paragraph in the prompt costs time, so cut what the assistant does not need.

TIP Call it yourself and interrupt it in the middle of a sentence. If it keeps talking over you, fix that before anything else.

CONNECT A PHONE LINE

A real number that people can dial, attached to the assistant.

OPTION A: TWILIO

- Fastest way to test
- A trial number shows a US caller ID, plays a "press any key" notice and only calls numbers you have verified
- Good for proving the idea, not for launch

OPTION B: LOCAL CARRIER OVER SIP

- You connect your own SIP trunk to the voice platform
- You need the carrier's gateway address and port (often 5060) and whether it uses a password
- The carrier must allow the voice platform's server addresses
- Usually cheaper and gives a local number

● GO LIVE IN FOUR MOVES

- 1 **Attach** the number to the assistant in the voice platform.
- 2 **Publish.** From this moment every caller to that number reaches the AI, so confirm it on purpose.
- 3 **Test** with your own phone first, then with two colleagues.
- 4 **Keep a Take offline button.** One click should give the number back to a human in seconds.

● ONE LINE PER COUNTRY

Lock each campaign to one country, and tie each line to that country's language, calling days and rules. That way a UAE number can never be called with another country's settings.

CHECK THE LAW Consent and recording rules, calling hours, caller ID rules and do-not-call lists differ by country (for example the TCPA in the US, TDRA in the UAE). We are not lawyers and this guide is not legal advice. Get it reviewed before you call strangers.

LET IT HANDLE THE CALL

What happens before, during and after each call.

TRANSFERS	The assistant says a short handover ("I'll put you through to sales") and forwards the call to the department's number. Note that "transfer started" is not the same as "someone answered": record what really happened.
CLOSED HOURS	Departments carry their hours and the assistant knows the local time. If nobody is in, it takes a message instead of transferring.
VOICEMAIL	It detects an answering machine and hangs up without pitching. Detection can misfire on a person with a long greeting, so test it.
CALLBACKS	When someone asks to be called back, it records the request and the time. It never promises a time the team has not confirmed.
LABELS	After each call, an AI reads the transcript and records the outcome (for example sold, next step, enquiry, callback requested), the objections and the contact details the person gave.
CRM	Each finished call is sent to your CRM as a signed message, and retried if it fails.

● WHAT THE CRM MESSAGE CONTAINS

```
# one signed HTTPS POST per finished call
X-Dialer-Signature: t=<timestamp>,v1=<HMAC-SHA256(secret, "t.body")>
Idempotency-Key: <call id>
{ "outcome": "next_step", "contact": { "name", "email", "phone", "company",
  "interest", "callback_time" }, "summary", "transcript", "recording_url",
  "transferred_to", "opted_out", "notes" }
```

- **Signature** lets your server check that the message is really from you.
- **Idempotency key** lets your server ignore a repeat of the same call.
- **Retries** every 10 minutes, up to 5 tries, then flagged for a human.

TIP Only capture what the person actually said. Drop badly formed emails and numbers instead of guessing.

RUN OUTBOUND CALLS SAFELY

Outbound is where mistakes cost you reputation. The guards below are not optional.

● LEAD LISTS

- Upload CSV or Excel. The system cleans numbers, adds the country prefix and removes duplicates.
- A number can exist in only one campaign, ever, so nobody is called twice by accident.
- Each lead can carry a category (for example clinics or real estate) so you can split a campaign and give each category its own offer.

● CALL TYPES

A call type is a script plus a goal: **cold sale, interview, appointment booking, feedback** or **reactivating a dormant lead**. Each carries one approved offer, and the assistant states only the facts in it.

● THE GUARDS

GUARD	WHAT IT DOES
Calling window	Only your working days and hours in the lead's local time (ours: Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 18:00 in the UAE).
Frequency	At most 1 call per number per day and 2 per week; at most 2 attempts per lead, a day apart.
Opt-out	If the person says to stop or remove them (we detect English and Arabic), the number goes to a do-not-call list automatically.
Daily budget	A spending cap per day; in-flight calls count towards it.
STOP ALL	One click stops new calls. Calls already live are not cut off.
Test mode	Only your own allowed numbers are dialled until you switch it off on purpose.

BEFORE YOU SWITCH TEST MODE OFF Have the calling rules for each country reviewed, and run a small batch of 10 to 20 leads first.

HOW IT IS WIRED

The exact path of a call, from the caller to your CRM.

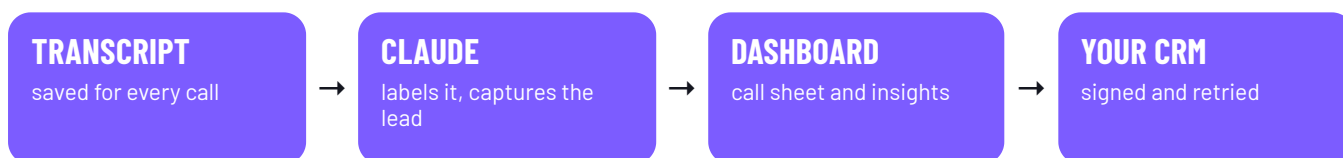
INBOUND



OUTBOUND



AFTER EVERY CALL



● THE PIECES AND THEIR JOBS

PIECE	JOB
VAPI	The voice engine: speech recognition, the AI that decides what to say, the voice, call transfer and voicemail detection.
Twilio / SIP carrier	Delivers the phone call to and from the voice engine.
Deepgram	Speech recognition and voices.
Claude	Reads each finished transcript: outcome, objections, contact details.
FastAPI + SQLite	Our own server: campaigns, guards, call history, the CRM sender.
React	The dashboard: live board, call sheets, settings.

A FRONT-DESK PROMPT

Copy this, replace every [BRACKET] and shorten it. Every line you remove makes replies faster.

You are the phone receptionist for [BUSINESS NAME] ([HOW IT SHOULD BE PRONOUNCED])).
Say you are an AI assistant if asked.

THE CURRENT TIME is [LOCAL TIME]. Opening hours: [HOURS].

GOAL: help the caller in a short, friendly call. Find out what they need,
answer from the facts below, and send them to the right person.

YOUR ONLY SOURCE OF FACTS:
[PASTE YOUR KNOWLEDGE]

DEPARTMENTS (transfer only when open):
[NAME] : send when [WHEN] : hours [HOURS]

RULES

- Speak in at most two short sentences, then stop and let them talk.
Ask one question at a time.
- State only facts written above. If you do not know, say you do not want to guess and that the team will follow up.
- Never promise a day or time for a callback.
- If asked about price and it is not written above: say the team confirms it on a call.
- If they ask for a person or a department, say a short handover line and transfer. If it is closed, take a name, number and message.
- If they say stop, be removed, or no twice: thank them and end the call.
- Match the caller's language ([LANGUAGES]).
- If you reach voicemail, hang up without leaving a pitch.
- When the conversation is finished, say goodbye once and end the call.

FOR OUTBOUND Add: who you are calling ([NAME]), the single goal, one clear ask and one gentle follow-up, and "if they give a different name, confirm it politely".

TIP Keep a copy of every version you ship. When a change makes calls worse, you can go back.

THIRTEEN CALLS BEFORE LAUNCH

Make these calls yourself. Do not launch until every line passes.

CALL THIS	IT SHOULD
☐ Ask the opening hours	Answer correctly from your details
☐ Ask about a service you did not write down	Say it won't guess and the team will follow up
☐ Ask the price	Give your written price or "confirmed on a call"
☐ Ask for a specific department	Hand over and transfer
☐ Call when the department is closed	Take a message instead
☐ Interrupt it mid-sentence	Stop and listen
☐ Say your brand name	Pronounce it correctly
☐ Speak another supported language	Switch language
☐ Ask "are you a robot?"	Say it is an AI
☐ Say "stop calling me"	End politely and mark do-not-call
☐ Let an outbound call reach voicemail	Hang up without a pitch
☐ Hang up in the middle of a call	Record a transcript and a status
☐ Check your CRM after a call	Show the lead once, not twice

TIP Record each test. Replaying a call shows problems that you miss when you are the one talking.

MISTAKES WE **ALREADY MADE**

Each of these cost us time. Skip them.

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT TO DO
The voice said the brand name wrongly ("Encore" for "Anqor").	Spell the sound in the prompt and test it out loud.
A long prompt made replies take 2 to 3 seconds.	Trim the prompt. Remove anything the assistant does not need.
A person with a long greeting was treated as voicemail and hung up on.	Test voicemail detection with real greetings before a big batch.
"Transfer started" was recorded as "transferred".	Record the destination and what really happened.
An answering machine's greeting was transcribed as the person speaking and counted as answered.	Let the end reason override "answered" when it says voicemail.
The platform rejected fields it did not know.	Read the current docs and test requests on one call before you automate them.
An agent created through an API had defaults we did not want: an empty webhook and a recording-consent prompt.	Check the defaults of anything you create by API.
A key was pasted in the wrong place.	Keep keys in a private config file only. Rotate any key that was exposed.
Labels failed silently when the AI login expired.	Show health on the dashboard and retry failed labels automatically.

LAUNCH CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU FLIP THE SWITCH

- ☐ All 13 test calls pass
- ☐ Your Knowledge is current and someone else read it
- ☐ A human can be reached from every transfer, and a Take offline button works
- ☐ Consent, recording, hours and caller-ID rules checked for each country
- ☐ Daily budget, calling window and STOP ALL set
- ☐ A small first batch (10 to 20 calls) planned, with someone listening

● WHAT TO WATCH IN THE FIRST WEEK

ANSWERED RATE	How many calls reach a person, not voicemail.
OUTCOMES	How many ended as sold, next step, callback or no interest.
OPT-OUTS	If many ask to stop, your list or your opening line is wrong.
TRANSFERS	Did a human really pick up?
COST PER CALL	Against your daily budget.

WANT US TO SET THIS UP FOR YOU?

We build and run AI voice assistants for businesses. Tell us about your calls and we will show you how it would work for you.

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