ASHGRO RESEARCH · AUGUST 2026

Is Your Club Failing Your Prospects?

We sent a genuine membership inquiry to 225 private clubs across 46 states, then tracked exactly what came back. This is what the front door of the private club industry actually looks like, and why the people standing at it are set up to lose.

28% of clubs never responded to a genuine inquiry, 64 of 225

1 in 9 ever picked up the phone (11%)

96% of clubs that replied never followed up a second time

43% led with a price instead of a conversation

The uncomfortable question

Every private club in America spends money to be found. A website, a little advertising, a referral from a happy member, all of it exists to produce one moment: a prospective member, unprompted, raising a hand and saying I'm interested. It is the single most valuable event in the entire membership funnel, and it is the one moment a club controls completely.

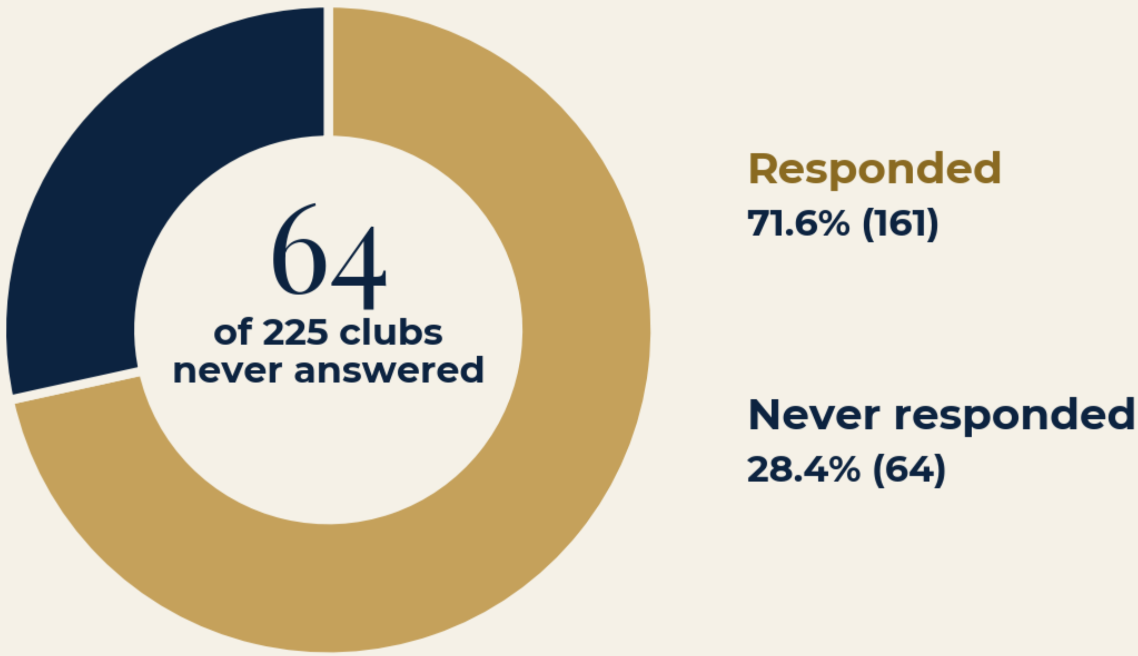
So we decided to measure what happens next. Over roughly two months, we submitted a real membership inquiry through the website of 225 private clubs in 46 states, the same prospect, the same details, every time, and logged every response: whether one came, how fast, through which channel, whether it led with a price, and whether anyone ever followed up.

The finding underneath all the numbers is not that clubs are bad at this. It is that clubs are structured to **gather** members rather than **hunt** for them, and gathering only works until it doesn't.

A note on tone, up front. This study is not a gotcha. No club is named anywhere in it. Most membership directors we're describing are pulled in ten directions, were never given sales training, and were never handed a real process. The passivity the data shows is not a character flaw, it is the predictable result of a role built for administration and asked to do sales. The point is to make an invisible gap visible, and then to close it.

Finding 1: More than a quarter never answer

More than 1 in 4 clubs never responded



All 225 audited clubs. A response is any contact of any kind, at any point in the follow-up window.

Sixty-four clubs, 28.4%, never responded in any form. No email, no call, no acknowledgment, weeks after a genuine inquiry submitted through the club's own website.

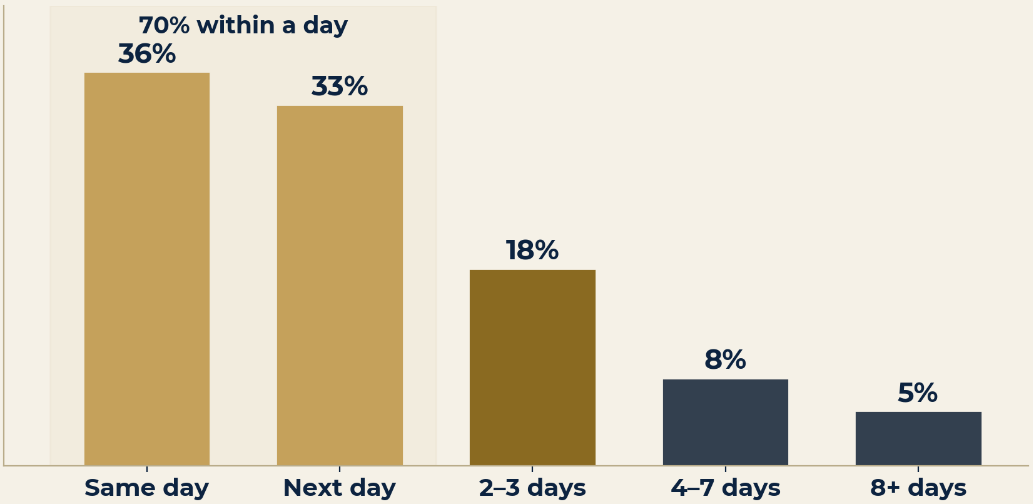
Let's question that number before we trust it

A fair objection: maybe some of those forms failed, or the reply went to spam. Possible, and we can't rule it out for any single club. But three things make "technical error" an unconvincing explanation for a quarter of the field: the inquiries used a real, monitored address that received 161 other clubs' replies just fine; the non-responses are spread evenly across 46 states and every website platform; and the pattern held steady across two months. When one club goes silent, blame the form. When one in four does, it's the process.

Finding 2: Clubs answer fast, or not at all

Answer fast, or not at all

Of clubs that replied with a dated response (n=159). 70% came back within a day; median lag was 1 day.

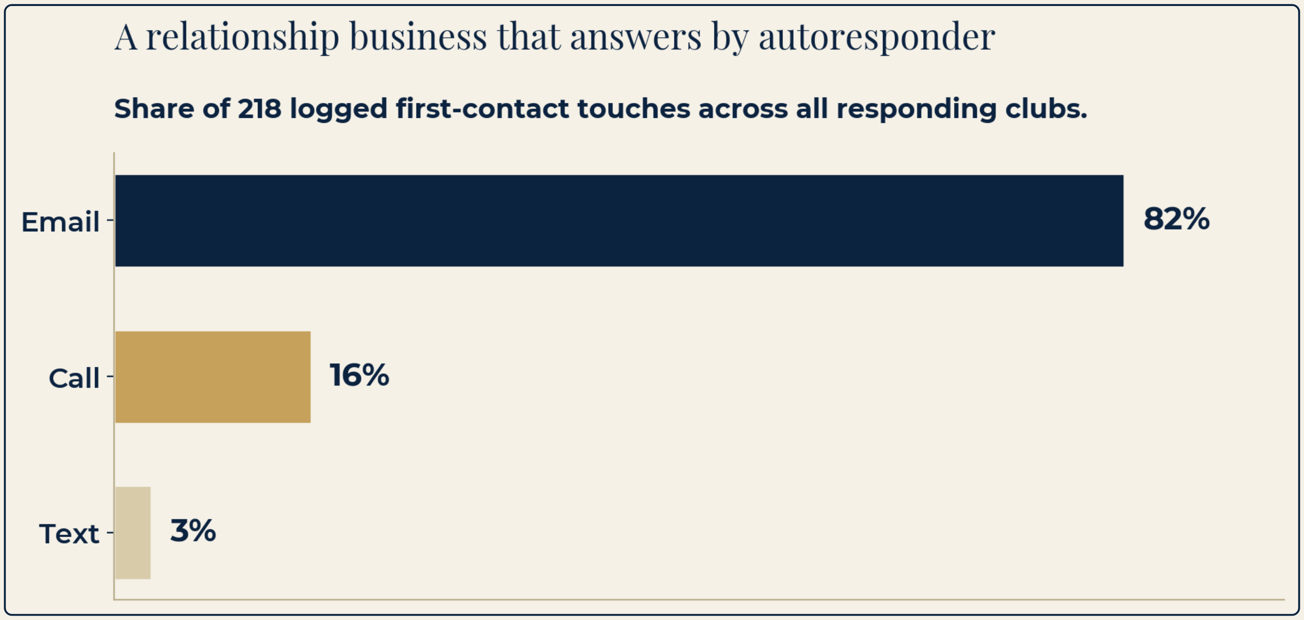


Time from inquiry to first response, for clubs that replied with a dated response (n=159).

Among clubs that did reply, the response was usually quick: 70% came back within a single day and the median lag was one day. Very few clubs replied slowly-but-eventually, only 13% took four days or more. So the failure mode isn't sluggishness. It's a clean split: a club is either wired to catch an inquiry, or the inquiry vanishes. There is very little in between.

> **Why this matters:** a prospect researching clubs rarely inquires at just one. They fill out three or four forms the same evening. When two-thirds of a field answers within a day, speed alone no longer wins, it's the price of entry. What happens inside that first response is where clubs separate.

Finding 3: A relationship business that answers by autoresponder



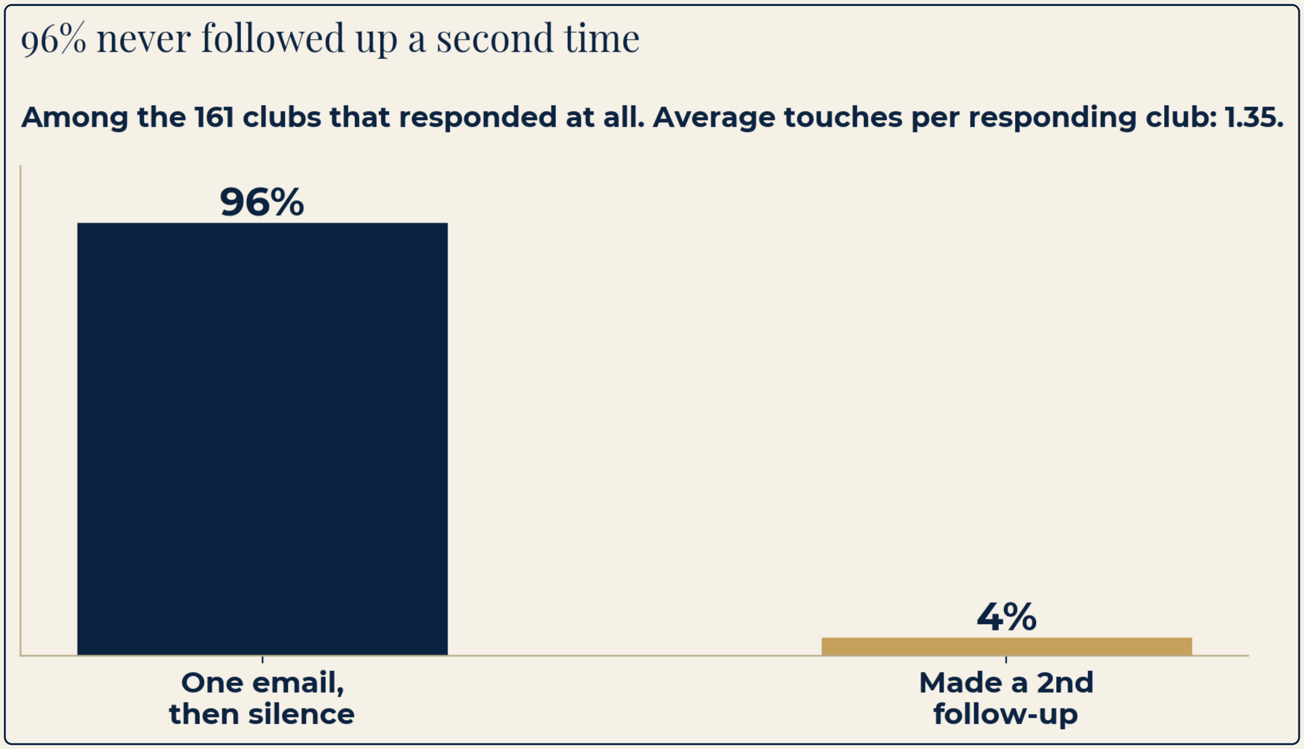
Share of 218 logged first-contact touches across all responding clubs.

Eighty-two percent of all contact was email. Only 25 clubs, 11%, about one in nine, ever picked up the phone, and just six ever sent a text. Sixteen percent of touches were calls; three percent were texts.

Sit with the irony. A private club sells the most personal product in hospitality: belonging, connection, being known by name. And at the exact moment a stranger asks to be let in, the near-universal reflex is to send an email and wait. The medium contradicts the message.

CHANNEL	TOUCHES LOGGED	SHARE
Email	178	82%
Phone call	34	16%
Text message	6	3%

Finding 4: One email, then silence



Follow-up behavior among the 161 clubs that responded at all.

This is the finding that should stop a general manager cold. Of the 161 clubs that responded, **154 never made a second contact.** Ninety-six percent were one-and-done. Only seven clubs in the entire study of 225 followed up a second time. The average number of touches for a responding club was 1.35.

In any professional sales context, a single unanswered email is not the end of the process, it's the very beginning of it. Most buyers don't reply the first time for reasons that have nothing to do with interest. The follow-up is the job. Here, it essentially doesn't exist.

Finding 5: A number is not a conversation

Of the 69 clubs that led with a price, only 5 (7%) followed up and only 3 (4%) ever called.

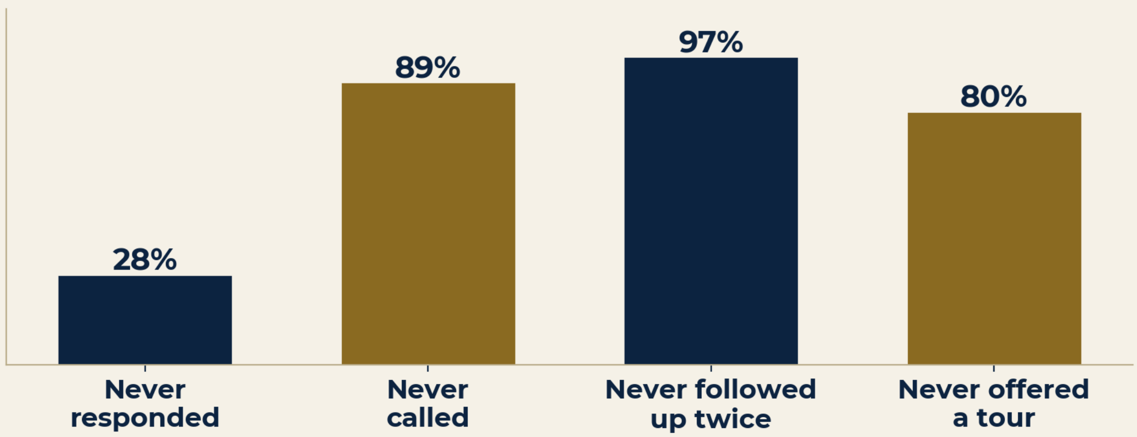
Forty-three percent of responders led with a price, a dues or initiation figure in the very first message. And once that number went out, the trail went cold: of those 69 clubs, only five ever followed up (7%) and only three ever called (4%). Sending a price wasn't the start of a conversation. It was the end of one. That 43% is the conservative count, too, include clubs that led with dues, initiation, or fee figures without the word "pricing," and the share who opened with a number climbs to roughly half.

Sending a price that early costs a club twice. It qualifies no one: the club learns nothing about who this person is, what they want, or whether the fit is even there. And it forecloses the only conversation that actually sells a membership. Underneath the form, a prospect isn't asking what does it cost. They're asking is this a place for my family, and will we belong here. A dues figure in an inbox answers a question nobody led with, and quietly ends the one that matters. Meanwhile, only 12% of responders explicitly invited the prospect to tour, the single highest-converting next step in the entire process.

The pattern: gatherers, not hunters

Gatherers, not hunters

Share of all 225 clubs exhibiting each passive behavior. The pipeline is waited on, not worked.



Share of all 225 clubs exhibiting each passive behavior.

Put the findings side by side and a single silhouette appears. The overwhelming majority of clubs **gather**: they put a form on a website, answer the ones that come in, send what's asked for, and wait. Very few **hunt**: pursue, call, qualify, follow up, and steer every prospect toward a visit. The pipeline is waited on, not worked.

This is a structural story, not a blame story

At most clubs, membership is a one-person department, and often not even a full one. That person owns prospecting, tours, onboarding, member events, committee prep, and board reporting. They were almost never hired out of sales, almost never trained in it, and almost never handed a defined process to run. Ask someone built for gracious administration to also be a hunter, give them no cadence and no tools, and gathering is the rational result. It is what the structure produces.

> **And here's the part that's easy to miss:** gathering works, as long as the club sits in a strong position, with a waitlist and members who refer their friends without being asked. The referral flywheel hides the gap. But markets soften, waitlists thin, a new club opens across town, a generation ages out. The moment the inbound slows, a club that only knows how to gather has no muscle to hunt, and by the time the budget notices, the pipeline has been leaking quietly for a year.

What we can't conclude (and where we'd push back on ourselves)

A study is only as honest as its limits, so here are ours:

A single inquiry is a snapshot, not a verdict

We measured one inquiry per club. A club that missed ours might handle the next one flawlessly. What the data supports is a field-level pattern across 225 clubs, not a report card on any one.

Some silence is rational

A handful of clubs are genuinely full. Eight told us so, surfacing a waitlist in their first reply. A club with a three-year wait has less reason to chase a cold inquiry, though the smartest ones still nurture the list, because waitlists empty faster than anyone expects.

We scored the motion, not the charm

We logged whether a club called, followed up, or offered a tour, not how warm the email was. It's possible some one-and-done replies were so good they didn't need a second touch. Possible. But 96% is not a rounding error, and hope is not a follow-up strategy.

None of these caveats move the core finding. They sharpen it: even read generously, the private club front door is being gathered, not hunted.

What the leak is worth

The numbers below are an illustrative model, not a measurement from this study, but they frame the stakes. On conservative economics, a new member is worth about $32,800 in year one (a ~$25,000 initiation plus ~$7,800 in dues), and the national-average initiation is now closer to $60,000. A prospect who inquires and is never answered isn't a missed email. It's five figures of replacement revenue discarded before a conversation begins.

The research on speed is just as stark. In the widely cited MIT / InsideSales lead-response study, the odds of making contact with a lead dropped roughly 100× when the first attempt came at 30 minutes instead of 5, and the odds of qualifying one dropped about 21×. Most clubs answer a Saturday-night inquiry on Monday, if at all.

The resolution: how a hunter's front door works

None of this requires a bigger marketing budget. It requires treating the inquiry as the start of a sales process instead of the end of a web form. Six changes, in order of impact:

1. Give the front door an owner

Someone, a person or a system, must be accountable for every inquiry within minutes, including nights and weekends, when most inquiries actually arrive. The 7pm Tuesday lead cannot wait for Thursday.

2. Call before you price

Lead with a person, not a number. A two-minute call to say I got your note, tell me about what you're looking for outperforms any dues sheet. Pricing comes after fit, not before it.

3. Build a follow-up cadence and actually run it

One email is not a process. A simple five-touch sequence over two weeks, call, email, text, value, invite, would put a club ahead of 96% of the field measured here.

4. Make the tour the goal of every first contact

The visit converts. Yet only 12% of responders invited one. Every first reply should point at a tour, not a PDF.

5. Measure response time like a number that matters

Most clubs cannot say how fast they answer inquiries because no one watches it. What gets measured gets managed.

6. Train and equip the gatherer to hunt

This is the generous, structural fix. The director isn't the problem; the absence of a process, a cadence, and a tool is. Give them the training, the CRM that surfaces today's follow-ups, and, where it helps, a concierge that answers instantly and a sales professional to share the load, and a gatherer becomes a hunter fast.

Where AshGro fits

This is the exact gap we were built to close. The **AI Club Concierge** answers every inquiry in seconds, at any hour, so nothing sits in an inbox overnight. **Membership sales staffing** puts a trained professional on the calls and the follow-up. **Training** gives an existing director the process they were never handed. And a **membership sales audit** starts by measuring exactly what this study measured, for your club, by name, so you know your own number before you change anything.

Score your own front door

Before you add a dollar of marketing, answer these honestly. Every "no" is a place you're likely losing prospects you already paid to attract.

- ○ If someone inquired through your website at 7pm tonight, do you know exactly what would happen, and how fast?
- ○ Is one person (or system) clearly accountable for every inquiry, including nights and weekends?
- ○ When an inquiry arrives, does a real person make a call, or does a number just go out?
- ○ Do you have a written multi-step follow-up cadence, and does anyone actually run it?
- ○ Does every first response invite the prospect to tour the club?
- ○ Can you state, right now, your average response time to a web inquiry?
- ○ If your membership director left tomorrow, would the prospect history leave with them?
- ○ Is anyone measuring any of this, or is it assumed to be working?

Methodology & citation

Over roughly two months (June–August 2026), AshGro submitted one genuine membership inquiry through the website of each of 225 private clubs across 46 U.S. states, using identical prospect details each time, and logged each response for occurrence, timing, channel, pricing, and follow-up. All figures are aggregate; no individual club is identified. Response-timing percentages use the 159 responding clubs with a dated first response. Economic and lead-response figures in "What the leak is worth" are external, illustrative, and labeled as such. Suggested citation: AshGro Membership Partners, Private Club Membership Inquiry Response Study, 2026. Questions: sales@ashgropartners.com.