⏱️ 10 MIN SETUP

Auto-Reply After Hours

Part of our Small Business Automation guide: what to automate first and the 10 easiest wins.

The problem

Enquiries that arrive at night or on weekends sit unanswered, and the customer contacts someone else. An after-hours auto-reply tells them you got the message and when you'll reply.

What you need

- Gmail or Outlook
- Zapier (for SMS or time-based rules)

Setup with Zapier (Gmail or Twilio)

1. Create a Zap with the trigger **Gmail, New Email** (or **Twilio, New SMS**).
2. Add **Filter by Zapier** using the time of the message: only continue outside your opening hours.
3. Add **Gmail, Reply to Email** (or **Twilio, Send SMS**) with your after-hours message. [Screenshot]
4. Test it with a message sent outside your hours, then turn it on.

Setup with Make (Gmail or Twilio)

1. Trigger with **Gmail, Watch Emails**.

2. Add a filter on the current time and day.
3. Reply with **Gmail, Send an Email** to the sender.
4. Turn on scheduling.

Message template

> Thanks for getting in touch with [Business]! We're closed right now and will reply by [time] on our next business day. If it's urgent, call [number].

Consent and local rules

This is a reply to someone who contacted you, so it isn't marketing. Don't add promotions to it. Any marketing message needs opt-in consent and an unsubscribe option (TCPA and CAN-SPAM in the US, the Spam Act in Australia, PECR and GDPR in the UK and EU, CASL in Canada). This isn't legal advice.

FAQ

Can I just use Gmail's vacation responder?

Yes, but it stays on until you turn it off, so it can't follow your opening hours. A Zapier or Make filter checks the time of each message and only replies when you're closed. That way daytime enquiries get a real reply from you instead.

Will the auto reply answer spam and newsletters?

It will unless you filter them out. Add a filter that skips no-reply addresses, newsletters and anything that's already been answered. Test it for a few days and add more filters if junk gets through.

What should an after-hours message say?

Thank them, say you're closed, and tell them exactly when they'll hear back. If you take urgent jobs, add a number to call. Keep promotions out of it, because it's a reply, not a marketing message.

Can I send a text instead of an email?

Yes. Use a Twilio number as the trigger and reply with Twilio, Send SMS when the message arrives outside your hours. If calls are the problem rather than emails, see Missed-call text-back.

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