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No More ~~Excuses~~

How top teams convert, close, and scale with internet leads.

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The Lead Isn't the Problem.

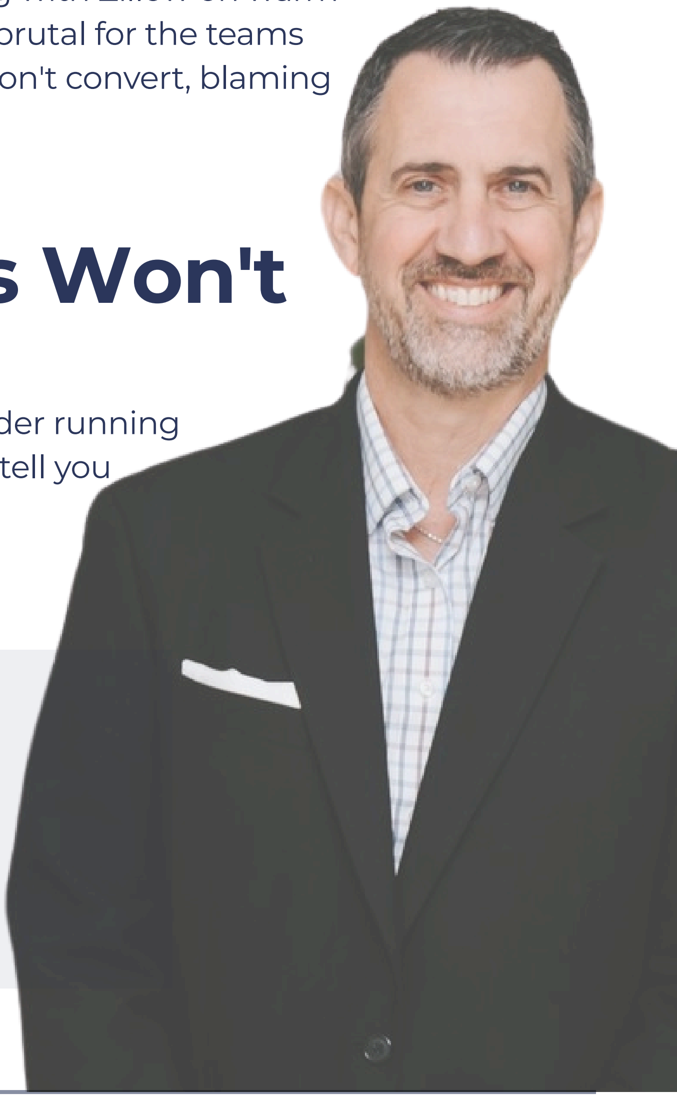
Here's the painful truth most team leaders won't say out loud.

You're spending real money on internet leads. Somewhere between $50 and several thousand dollars per lead, depending on the source. Maybe you're running pay-per-click on Google. Maybe you're partnered with Zillow. Maybe you've got a flat-fee program, or a success-fee partner, or all of the above.

And according to NAR, the average conversion rate on those leads is somewhere around **1 to 1.5%**.

That's not a typo. One and a half percent.

In 26 years in this business, I've worked with independent companies that invested millions of dollars in inside sales call centers. I've worked with teams buying zip codes and trying to convert cold. I've worked with teams partnering with Zillow on warm transfers. And across every model I've seen, the math is brutal for the teams that don't have a system. They're paying for leads they don't convert, blaming the lead, and asking for more.



The Math Most Teams Won't Say Out Loud.

Three numbers should sit on the desk of every team leader running an internet lead program. They are the diagnostic. They tell you everything you need to know about whether you have a system or whether you're just hoping.

The Scoreboard

<1%	**47 hrs**	**$2k**
Industry average conversion rate on those leads.	**Average agent response time to a new lead.**	**What you're paying per internet lead, depending on source.**

Meanwhile, I've worked with a team in the Carolinas that's converting internet leads at **9 to 10% on a consistent monthly basis**. Same lead sources. Same market dynamics. Same prices per lead. Different conversion rate by six to eight times.

The difference isn't talent. It isn't market. It isn't the lead.

It's the system.

Stop Treating Conversion Like a Personality Trait.

This guide is built on one idea: stop treating internet lead conversion like something agents are born with, and start treating it like a repeatable process.

Speed. Scripts. Follow-up cadence. Mindset. Tracking. These are the things top-converting teams do differently, and none of them require a special skill. What they require is a system, and the discipline to install it.

You're not losing leads to better agents. You're losing them to faster ones.

This guide isn't going to slowly build to the answer over fifty pages. The answer is in front of you right now: speed, system, follow-through. Everything that follows is how to install those three things in your team.

If you read this and put it on a shelf, nothing will change. If you read it and install it this week, not next quarter, your conversion numbers will look different by month's end.

Let's get into it.

— Karlton Utter

Chapter 01

The Painful Truth

The first thing you have to accept is that the lead isn't broken.

When someone clicks on a property, fills out a form, or accepts a warm transfer, they've already done the work. They researched the market. They scrolled past dozens of homes. They found one that caught their attention. And they raised their hand to talk to somebody.

That's a high-intent moment. Their motivation is up here.

What happens next is what kills the conversion. The lead hits your CRM, or your inbox, or your phone. You're busy. You'll call them tonight when you get home. You get home, you're tired, you'll call them tomorrow. Tomorrow comes, and you figure they've probably already found another agent, so what's the point.

The average agent's response time on an internet lead is **47 hours**.

By 47 hours, the lead is gone. They've heard from 3 to 5 other agents. They've cooled off. The moment they had your name in their head as a possibility has passed.

The lead didn't fail. The system failed. Or more honestly, the lack of one did.

Here's the number that should change how you think about all of this:

> **21x**
>
> **An agent who qualifies a lead within 5 minutes is 21 times more likely to qualify them than an agent who waits 30 minutes.**

Not 21% more likely. Twenty-one times more likely.

You're not losing leads to better agents. You're losing them to faster ones.

Chapter 01

The Painful Truth

What the Top Teams Know

The teams converting at 9 to 10% aren't smarter. They're not in different markets. They aren't running secret playbooks. They've installed three things that the average team hasn't:

- A speed system that hits every lead inside five minutes.
- A follow-up cadence that runs for months without willpower.
- A script structure that closes for the appointment in the first 90 seconds.

This guide is how to install all three. We'll go in order; speed first, because nothing else matters if you don't show up in time.

Chapter 02

The 3 Foundations

Before we get into the tactics, there are three foundations you have to set in place. Without these, none of the scripts or cadences work. With them, the scripts and cadences become repeatable systems your team can run whether anyone feels like it or not.

01
Accountability
Hold yourself accountable first. Hold your team accountable to a specific standard.

02
System
Everyone works leads the same way, so you can actually evaluate what's working.

03
Value
Your team sees internet leads as a privilege, not a chore.

Foundation One: Accountability

Accountability is not a punishment. It's the structure that lets you actually run a business instead of hoping things go well.

If you're an agent, hold yourself accountable to the leads in front of you. Those leads were paid for. If you've got 20 sitting in your CRM and you haven't worked them, that's a problem you can fix today.

If you're a team leader, hold yourself accountable first.

- Are you doing one-on-ones with your agents about their lead pipelines?
- Are you creating a culture where everyone is making calls together?
- Are you reviewing the CRM to see what's actually happening with the leads you paid for?

Then hold your agents accountable. Those are your leads. You bought them. You have every right, and every obligation, to expect that they're being worked.

Accountability is what lets you calculate ROI, set realistic goals for next year, and know whether you have the right people on the team in the first place. It's not optional. It's the floor.

The 3 Foundations

Foundation Two: System

If you don't have a system, you can't have accountability. There's nothing to be accountable to.

A system is a specific way you and your team work every internet lead. Same speed-to-lead target. Same first-call script. Same follow-up cadence. Same CRM workflow. Same hot/warm/cold classification.

When everyone works leads the same way, you can evaluate what's working and what isn't. You can tell whether the script is the issue, or the speed, or the cadence. You can find the actual leak in your funnel and patch it. When everyone works leads their own way, you can't tell anything. You just have anecdotes.

Foundation Three: Value

Your team has to see internet leads as a privilege, not a chore.

I've had agents tell me they don't want to pay the referral fee. My answer is always the same: you wouldn't have had that lead without the referral. If you don't want to pay the fee, go sit open houses. Go run your own marketing. Go spend your own money to generate lead flow. You have every right to do that.

But the agent who complains about the cost of the lead is the agent who isn't going to work the lead with urgency. They've already discounted it. If your agent doesn't see the value, they're not the right fit for an internet lead team. That's a recruiting conversation, not a training one.

Chapter 03

The 5 Killers of Internet Lead Conversion

There are five things that kill conversion on internet leads. The good news is they're predictable, which means they're fixable. Here they are in order.

1. Speed. How fast you respond to the first lead notification.
2. Scripts. What you say in the first 90 seconds of contact.
3. Follow-up systems. Your cadence over days, weeks, and months.
4. Mindset. How you think about the lead, the work, and the timeline.
5. Tracking. Whether you actually know what's happening with each lead in your pipeline.

The rest of this section goes deep on each of them, starting with the one that matters most: speed.

Fix speed first. Without it, none of the others will rescue you.

Chapter 04

Speed Kills Excuses

A quick story.

When I was 19, I worked at Chili's. They had this thing they called the moment of truth. From the second a guest got sat at one of my tables, I had 30 seconds to walk over and say, "Hi folks, I'm Karlton, I'll be taking care of you tonight. I've got to drop a few things off, I'll be right back."

That's it. Thirty seconds. Just to let the guest know I was there, I knew they were there, and I cared.

Why 30 seconds? Because if you've ever sat down at a restaurant and watched a server walk past you, then watched another party get seated and served before anyone said a word to you, you know what happens. Your experience is already shot. The food has to be incredible just to recover, because the service has already told you what you're worth to that restaurant.

Internet leads are the same thing.

The moment of truth is the first response. Not the perfect response. Just any response that signals: I see you, I'm coming, you're not waiting in line.

What Top Converters Actually Do

Top converters get on the phone within 5 minutes. They have phone alerts set up so they get a notification the second the lead drops. They have a text template ready to fire off automatically:

> **Auto-Text Template:**
>
> *"Hey, appreciate you reaching out. I'm going to be responding to your email/call/text within the next 30 minutes. When you see this number come up, it's me, so you don't think it's spam."*

That text creates the moment of truth. The lead now knows their inquiry hit a real human, that human is coming, and they don't need to keep shopping.

Speed Kills Excuses

Some teams take it further. They send a quick video message. They have an ISA pre-screen and warm-transfer to the agent in the field. One company I worked with built an inside sales associate program around speed-to-lead. Every email got a return call within 30 seconds. Every warm lead got transferred to an agent in the field immediately. Their conversion went from the industry 1.5% to 4 or 5%, just by fixing the speed.

That was twenty years ago. The bar has moved up, not down.

The 5-Minute Rule

Here's the number that should sit on the desk of every agent on your internet lead team:

> **21x**
>
> **More likely to qualify a lead if you reach them in 5 minutes vs. 30 minutes.**

Twenty-one times.

This is not about being smarter. It's about being faster. The agent who hits the phone in 5 minutes wins the lead. The agent who waits 30 minutes is competing with 3 to 5 other agents who already had the conversation.

If your team isn't hitting 5 minutes consistently, the fix is mechanical. Turn on instant phone alerts in the CRM. Set up the automatic text template. Have someone in the office whose job is to monitor incoming leads and hand them off. Whatever it takes.

Stop trying to convince your team to "follow up faster." Build the system that makes faster the default.

The ALM Framework

Once you're in the conversation, the next problem is what to say.

A lot of agents get this wrong from the first sentence. The lead's motivation is up here. They just clicked on a beautiful property they're excited about. They're imagining themselves in it. And the first thing the agent says is:

> **WRONG**
>
> *"Hey, I saw you're looking at homes. Are you currently working with an agent?"*

The lead's motivation just dropped through the floor. You took someone who was excited about a specific home and made them think about real estate logistics. You signaled that you're more interested in qualifying them than helping them.

Don't do that.

Keep Them Up Here.

The right move on the first call, especially on a warm transfer, is to keep the lead in the same emotional state they were in when they clicked. They're excited about the property. Talk about the property.

> **RIGHT**
>
> *"I see you're interested in 123 Main Street. That's an awesome home. Beautiful hardwood floors, they just redid the kitchen, fenced-in yard. Available tonight, or would tomorrow work better?"*

That's a different conversation. You acknowledged the property. You added value (you know the home). You went straight to the appointment. The whole thing is forward motion.

This is the ALM approach. I used it for years before Zillow gave it a name. When I worked at a company that partnered with Zillow on warm transfers, they told us this was their preferred dialogue, so committed to it that they listened to calls and rated agents on whether they were using it.

They believe in it because it works.

Chapter 05

The ALM Framework

ALM stands for three things, and you ask for them in this order.

A — Appointment

Don't ask permission. Don't ask if they have an agent. Don't qualify their finances. Go straight for the appointment.

> *"Are you available tonight at 6, or would tomorrow work better?"*

If they push back, redirect:

> *"Happy to answer that. But while I have you, let me get something on the calendar so I can block out time for you, whether it's to do research or show you the property. Tonight or tomorrow?"*

L — Location

Once the appointment is on the calendar, find out what they're looking for. There's a stat that matters here: if you show 2 to 3 properties on the first appointment instead of just one, your conversion is 30% higher.

M — Motivation

Last, find out what's driving the move. This gives you long-term context. Once you have a sense of the motivation, wrap and book the call-back.

Chapter 06

LPMAMA

ALM is for the moment when the lead is on the phone, hot, and you have one job: get the appointment.

LP MAMA is for the longer conversations. When the lead comes in by email or text and you have your initial phone call back. When you're following up on a slightly cooler lead. When you're building a relationship before the appointment is on the calendar.

It stands for:

- **L** — Location
- **P** — Price
- **M** — Motivation
- **A** — Agent
- **M** — Money (financing)
- **A** — Appointment

The order matters less than the content. The point is to cover all six in a way that doesn't feel like an interrogation.

Location and Price

> *"What areas are you focused on? What was it about this area that caught your attention? Do you have a price range in mind?"*

You're starting to understand the wants and needs. You're not pushing yet. You're learning.

Motivation

> *"What's driving the move? What brings you to the area?"*

Agent (handled carefully)

Do **not** ask "Are you currently working with an agent?" That question creates a defensive moment. They either say no (and feel awkward) or say yes (and now you're in competition mode before you've earned the right).

Ask this instead:

> *"What expectations do you have of me as your real estate agent?"*

Chapter 06

LPMAMA

Money

Do not ask "Have you been pre-approved?" That question kills motivation. It says you're more interested in their financial paperwork than in helping them find a home.

Ask this instead:

> *"Before we go any further, are you open to speaking with a loan officer to discuss your buying power in today's market?"*

Buying power is the magic phrase. It's about possibility, not paperwork.

The Outback Steakhouse Lesson

I learned this the hard way. When I was 19 or 20, I walked into a real estate office on a Saturday wanting to see properties. I was making 35 grand a year waiting tables at Outback and ready to invest in real estate. The agent sat me in a conference room, slid a pre-qualification form across the table, and told me to fill it out, mail it in, and come back when I had an answer.

I never went back. And I promised myself if I ever ended up on the other side of that desk, I'd never do that to a buyer.

Keep the motivation up. Get them in front of a home. Figure out the financing as part of the process, not as a gate.

Chapter 07

The 8 to 12 Touch Cadence

Most agents will follow up once or twice and quit. The numbers are brutal:

The Follow-Up Math

48%	80%	8-12
Of agents never follow up more than once.	Of deals require 5 or more touches.	The real sweet spot for follow-up touch count.

If you read those three numbers and didn't feel anything, read them again. Most agents are giving up at touch 2 on leads that close at touch 5 through 12. **Most agents are quitting on deals that were about to convert.**

Phase One: High Intensity (Days 1–3)

When the lead comes in, you hit them **3 times a day for 3 days.**

Three. Times. A day.

Don't worry about bothering them. That fear of rejection, that "I don't want to be annoying" instinct, is the single biggest conversion killer on the internet lead team. You have a real estate license. That license is permission to help people with the largest financial transaction of their lives. You're not bothering them. You're showing up.

Rotate the channels. Phone call. Text. Email. Maybe a video. The goal is to be visible, to create multiple touchpoints so they remember your name when they're ready to talk.

Phase Two: Sustained (Weeks 1–8)

After the first 3 days, move to 3 touches per week. Same rotation. Mix it up.

Every touch needs a reason. Not "just checking in." That's the worst phrase in real estate. Every touch is a property they should see, a rate drop that changed their buying power, or a market update relevant to their search.

> **Sample Re-Engagement**
>
> *"Rates just dropped. Your buying power went up. When we spoke, you were looking up to $250K. With this rate change, you can stretch to $275K. There are a few homes I want you to see in that range."*

The 8 to 12 Touch Cadence

Phase Three: Long-Term Nurture (Beyond Month 2)

Eventually, some leads aren't ready and won't be ready for a while. Move them to monthly nurture. Minimum.

These are warm reasons to call. A new listing. A market shift. A rate change. An invitation to an event your team is hosting. Whatever it takes to stay in front of them.

The reality on internet leads is that they average 90 to 180 days from first inquiry to signed contract. Some are 18 months out. Some are 2 years out. I've worked with teams that consistently closed leads after the 2-year mark.

Consistency beats talent. Show up when everyone else has quit.

The teams that win the long game are the teams that show up after everyone else moves on. If you're a Zillow team, you don't pay the success fee on leads worked over two years, so there's a financial reason to keep going beyond the easy timeline. But even if there weren't, the math is on your side.

Chapter 08

The Three Ponds

A system needs categories. You can't work 200 leads the same way. You'd burn out trying, and you'd waste time on cold leads while letting hot ones cool off.

Classify every lead in your CRM into one of three ponds.

01

Hot Pond

0–30 days. Daily calls and texts. Goal: appointment, properties, contract.

02

Warm Pond

1–6 months out. 3 touches per week. Cultivate the relationship.

03

Cold Pond

Long-term. Minimum monthly touches. Every touch has a reason.

The hot pond is what you protect. Top priority, calls before lunch, not after. **The warm pond** is where the cadence does its work. **The cold pond** is the long bet, the leads that close 18 to 24 months later, every one of them going to the agent who didn't quit at touch 2.

Chapter 09

Text Scripts That Actually Work

Most agents overthink the script. The good ones are simple, low-pressure, and end in a question.

Here are four scripts that work, taken straight from what I teach top teams.

First Contact (Day 1)

> *"Hey, this is Karlton with the Reside Platform. Saw you're checking out homes in the area. Quick question before I build your search, are you thinking of moving in the next 30 days, or pushing that out a quarter or two?"*

Why it works: assumptive close (you're "building their search"), no pressure, ends in an easy binary question.

Day 3 Follow-Up

> *"Karlton here, keeping an eye on the market for you. A few homes hit that I think you'd really be interested in. Can I send them over and get some appointments on the calendar?"*

Why it works: positions you as proactive (you've been watching), offers value (matched homes), and goes for the appointment.

Month Two Re-Engagement

> *"Hey, inventory is shifting. Is buying a home still on your radar? Call me, I have something important to discuss."*

Why it works: gives them a real reason to call back. "Inventory shifting" feels timely. "Something important" gets the callback.

Text Scripts That Actually Work

Handling "Just Send Me Listings"

When someone says they only want the listings, don't argue. Acknowledge, clarify, reframe, close. What I call ACRC.

> *"Absolutely, let me get those over to you. Do you mind if I include a couple others that match what you're looking for? Quick question so I send the right ones — what's your price range and how many beds? The MLS refreshes constantly, so I'll set up a live search and text you the second something matches. What's the best number for that?"*

You **acknowledged** what they wanted. You **clarified** what you needed. You **reframed** by offering more value (live search, text alerts). You **closed** by getting the phone number you need to keep the conversation going.

Use ACRC any time someone pushes back. Don't argue. Acknowledge, clarify, reframe, close.

Chapter 10

The 5-Step Fix

Everything in this guide reduces to five steps. If your team is doing all five, you'll convert at 5 to 10%. If they're not, you won't.

01 - Respond in 5 minutes

Alerts on. Text template ready. 5 minutes is the standard, not the goal.

02 - Use ALM & LPMAMA

Warm transfers go to ALM. Email/text leads go to LP MAMA.

03 - Lock the Appointment

Don't ask if. Ask when. Tonight or tomorrow. Virtual or in-person.

04 - Dlassify & Note It

Hot, warm, cold. Next step. Date. CRM. No "I think I called them last."

05 - Execute the Cadence

3 touches a day for 3 days. Then 3 a week. Then monthly. Stay in the game.

Chapter 11

Your 7-Day Action Plan

Don't read this and put it on a shelf. Install it this week.

Day 1 — Turn On Lead Notifications

Every CRM, every lead source. Phone alerts on. Email alerts on. If you're not getting pinged the second a lead drops, fix that first.

Day 2 — Build Your Auto-Text

Write your "I'll respond within 30 minutes" template. Save it in your phone. Test it on a teammate. Make sure it actually fires when a lead comes in.

Day 3 — Roleplay ALM With Your Team

Pair up. One person plays the lead, one plays the agent. Run ALM five times each. Get it to the point where the first call is reflex, not effort.

Day 4 — Classify Every Lead in Your CRM

Hot, warm, cold. Set the next step and date for every one. If you don't know the status, call them today to find out.

Day 5 — Build Your Cadence Templates

Write the day-1, day-3, week-2, month-2 messages. Save them in your CRM. Schedule the touches.

Day 6 — Audit Your Numbers

How many leads have you bought in the last 90 days? How many calls did you actually make? How many appointments? How many closings? Be honest. **You can't fix what you won't measure.**

Day 7 — Schedule One-on-Ones With Every Team Member

Walk through their pipeline. Identify the bottleneck. Hold them to the system you've just built.

Seven days. No new tools required. Just the discipline to install what you already know.

Conclusion

No More Excuses

I'll close with a story.

I had an agent on my team, 25 leads sitting in her CRM. She kept asking me for more leads. More leads. More leads.

I sat down with her and we went through every one. Each lead, I'd ask: "What's going on with this one?"

"Oh, they're not going to do anything. I tried to follow up. They're done."
I told her to keep going through the list. We got to one she'd written off. I picked up the phone myself and called.

"Yeah, we're still thinking about buying. The timing's not right yet, but probably in the next month or two we want to start looking. **Can you call us back in a week or so?**"

That was a closing sitting there.

The agent didn't know, because she hadn't picked up the phone. She'd given up at touch 2 on a lead that wanted to transact in the next 60 days.

That's the difference between teams that win on internet leads and teams that complain about them. It's not the leads. It's not the market. It's not the tech. It's whether the agent picks up the phone, and whether the leader holds them accountable to a system that makes sure they do.

You've got the system now. The teams that win from here are the ones that install it this week. Not next quarter.

The frameworks, the cadence, the scripts, the action plan, all of it traces back to one principle: stop making excuses, and start running the process.

Go run it.
— Karlton Utter
Head of Agent Training & Development