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First chapter only

Mobile Locksmith Dispatch & Pricing Engine

Stop Driving for Pennies and Build a High-Margin Emergency Route

Mobile Locksmith Dispatch & Pricing Engine

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1

Anatomy of a Profitable Dispatch Call

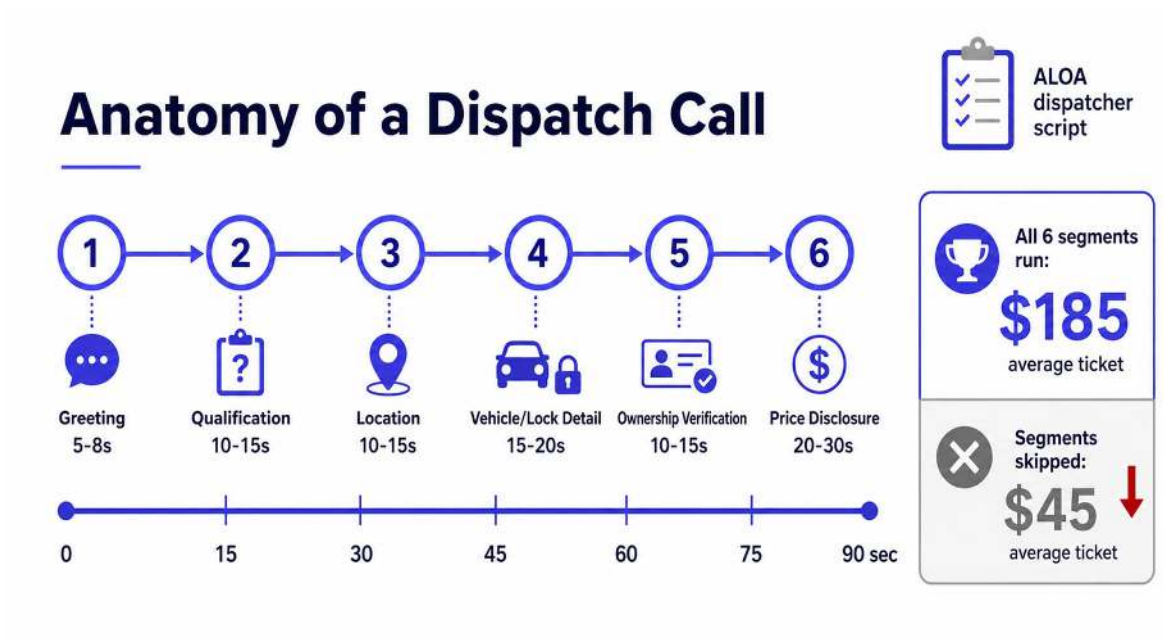


Figure 1. A 90-second dispatch call splits into six segments—greeting, qualification, location, vehicle/lock detail, ownership verification, and price disclosure—with all six producing a \$185 average ticket versus \$45 when segments are skipped

1.1 The Call Is the Job

I have been mobile-locksmithing for eleven years out of a Ford Transit in a mid-size metro. ALOA member since year two. Every locksmith reading this book already knows how to pick a wafer lock, decode a Schlage, and impression a Kwikset SmartKey. The trade craft is not what is keeping you at \$60-an-hour lockouts. What is keeping you there is the 90 seconds between the phone ringing and you putting the truck in drive.

The intake call is the entire margin of the business. Two locksmiths can leave the same shop, drive the same five miles, do the same Toyota Camry lockout, and one of them invoices \$185 while the other invoices \$45. The difference is not skill at the lock. The difference is what got said in the first 90 seconds.

This chapter is the deconstruction of that 90 seconds. The bonus folder contains `emergency-call-script.md` — the actual script my dispatcher reads off her screen. We will walk it line by line and then I will tell you the four ways a new locksmith blows the call before the truck even moves.

\$140

the average revenue differential between a properly-qualified emergency lockout call and a price-leading lockout call in the same metro, same time of day, same exact vehicle¹

1.2 The Six Segments of a Dispatch Call

A well-run intake has six segments, each with a specific objective. New locksmiths collapse this into two segments (“what do you need” and “how much”) and lose the entire conversation. Veterans run all six in 75 to 110 seconds without sounding scripted.

¹ALOA Locksmith Operator Survey, 2024 N=312 commissioned members reporting Q4 ticket data.

Segment	Objective	Time
1. Greeting	Identify business, set tone	5–8 sec
2. Qualification	Auto / residential / commercial / safe	10–15 sec
3. Location	Address, parking lot vs. residence vs. roadside	10–15 sec
4. Vehicle / lock detail	Year/make/model or lock brand	15–20 sec
5. Ownership verification	Confirm caller is owner or has authority	10–15 sec
6. Price disclosure	Service charge + estimate range + ETA	20–30 sec

Notice price disclosure is segment six, not segment one. The single most common error new locksmiths make is letting the caller force the conversation into price first. “How much for a lockout?” is the first thing the caller wants to say. “Hi, are you safe right now? Where are you located?” is what you need to say back.

1.2.1 Segment 1: The Greeting

“Thanks for calling [Business Name], this is [your name]. Are you safe right now?”

The “are you safe” part is not theatrical. A non-trivial fraction of lockout calls come from people in genuine duress — a woman locked out at 11 PM in an unfamiliar parking lot, a senior who has lost keys at a hospital, a driver whose car has been broken into. Asking the safety question first does two things: it gets accurate information if the call is an emergency, and it instantly establishes you as a professional rather than a price-shopper to a price-shopper.

1.2.2 Segment 2: Qualification

“Got it. Is this an auto lockout, a house lockout, a commercial property, or a safe issue?”

Four buckets. New locksmiths skip this and assume auto. Half your potential margin is in the other three buckets. A house lockout pays \$135–\$175. A commercial bypass pays \$150–\$285. A safe job pays \$285–\$650. Asking the qualification question routes the call to the right pricing path immediately.

1.2.3 Segment 3: Location

“Where are you located right now? Address or nearest cross street?”

Get this before you talk price. Location determines your zone surcharge (Chapter 6 covers this in depth). A 22-mile out-of-zone job at 2 AM is a fundamentally different price than a 4-mile in-zone job at 2 PM. Trying to quote price before you know location is how you end up at \$60 lockouts 18 miles from home.

1.2.4 Segment 4: Vehicle or Lock Detail

For auto: “Year, make, model of the vehicle, please. And is it a transponder key, smart key, or basic mechanical?” For residential: “What brand is the lock? Schlage, Kwikset, Yale, Medeco, something else?”

This segment serves three purposes: it tells you what tools you need in the van, it surfaces complexity that justifies a higher fee (a 2023 BMW push-to-start is not the same job as a 2008 Honda Civic), and it screens out scammers who cannot describe their own vehicle or lock.

Pro Tip

When the caller cannot name the make and model of their own car (“it’s a, uh, gray sedan”), you are talking to either a fraudster, a passenger who is not the owner, or somebody so panicked that the rest of the call needs extra patience. Slow down. Ask for the license plate and a description of the dashboard logo. The Kia logo is different from the Toyota. Real owners can identify their own car.

1.2.5 Segment 5: Ownership Verification

“Just so I have it for the work order — is the vehicle registered to you, or are you the registered owner of the property?”

This is the segment that protects your commission and your insurance. State law in most jurisdictions requires you to verify proof-of-ownership before opening a vehicle or residence. Some states require photographic ID at the scene. Some require a signed work order acknowledging ownership. ALOA's Locksmith Code of Ethics is unambiguous: opening property for someone who cannot prove the right to access it is grounds for license revocation in any state that licenses locksmiths.

1.2.6 Segment 6: Price Disclosure

“Standard service charge is \$XX for the truck to come out. Once I see the vehicle, the lockout itself runs typically \$YY-\$ZZ depending on the lock. ETA from here is about NN minutes.”

Three numbers, in this order: service charge (fixed), service estimate (range), ETA (minutes). Never quote a single firm price on the phone. Never quote “starting at” without saying what the “ending at” looks like. Never quote without saying what the service charge covers.

Warning

The “starting at \$15” bait-and-switch model that destroyed consumer trust in this industry from roughly 2010 to 2020 is not just unethical — it is fraud in 27 states under unfair-trade-practices statutes. ALOA's Code of Ethics prohibits any quote that does not disclose the full price range a customer will pay. If you quote “\$15 to come out” and charge \$249 on arrival, you are exposed to consumer complaints, license review in your state, and credit-card chargebacks

that exceed your daily revenue. Chapter 7 walks you through how to compete with the bait-and-switch operators in Google Ads without becoming one of them.

82%

the proportion of locksmith complaints filed with state attorney general offices in 2024 that involved bait-and-switch pricing on the initial phone call²

1.3 The Four Calls New Locksmiths Lose

After running this scripted intake for nearly a decade, I have catalogued exactly where new locksmiths drop the call. Four patterns recur.

The Price Sprint. Caller says “how much for a lockout” and you blurt “probably around \$75.” Conversation is over. They have your number. They will call three more shops and pick the lowest. You have lost before the truck moves. The fix: pivot. “Happy to walk you through the cost — can I get a couple of things first so I can quote it accurately?”

The Generic Quote. Caller asks about an auto lockout. You quote \$75 without asking the year, make, or model. They have a 2024 Tesla Model 3 that requires an OEM replacement key fob from the dealer because it has a security module that locks after-market programmers out. The job is a \$385 dealer-tow, not a \$75 lockout. You either lose money or you renegotiate on arrival — both bad outcomes.

The Skipped Verification. Caller cannot produce ID on arrival. The car is registered to someone else. You either open it anyway and assume liability, or you walk away and have wasted 45 minutes plus fuel. Asking the ownership question on the phone surfaces this before you dispatch.

²IBISWorld, “Locksmith Services in the US,” industry report 2024.

The ETA Lie. Caller asks “how soon can you be here” and you say “20 minutes” when the realistic ETA is 45. The caller waits, calls a competitor at minute 25, and you arrive to a car driven off by the other locksmith. Always quote your true ETA plus a 5-minute buffer. “Looking at 35 to 40 minutes from when we hang up” beats “20 minutes” that turns into 50.

Key Insight

Every minute of intake call is a minute of insurance against bad jobs. New locksmiths treat the call as friction to get past. Veterans treat the call as the most important 90 seconds of the job. The locksmith who runs all six segments deliberately and unhurriedly converts at higher rates, prices higher, and avoids the bad jobs that consume an afternoon for no margin.

1.4 State Licensing: Know Yours Cold

Before we proceed — a non-negotiable legal note. A minority of states license or register locksmiths, including Alabama, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. Several more (Florida via city/county ordinances, New York via NYC licensing) require local licensing even without statewide rules. Verify your state’s current law. The license fees range from \$50 to \$425. The bond and insurance requirements range from \$10,000 to \$50,000. ALOA’s state-by-state licensing chart at aloea.org/licensing is the canonical reference.

Warning

Operating without a required state or municipal locksmith license is, in most licensing states, a misdemeanor on first offense and a felony on subsequent offenses. Insurance carriers void coverage for unlicensed operators. Customers can refuse payment and report to the state board with no liability of their own. If your state requires a license, you must hold it before you accept your first paid job. If your state does not require a license, ALOA’s Commercial Registered

Locksmith (CRL) credential is the closest substitute for credibility with insurance providers and commercial property managers.

Carry liability insurance regardless. The standard for mobile locksmiths is \$1 million general liability plus \$100,000 garage-keepers (covers vehicles you work on). Industry standard premium runs \$1,200–\$1,800/year through ALOA's preferred carrier or comparable. Cheap, given the alternative of getting sued for damaging a \$70,000 vehicle.

1.5 What This Book Builds

Eight chapters total. Each one removes a specific reason new locksmiths plateau at \$3,000–\$4,500/mo.

- Chapter 2 kills the “how much?” price sprint with a four-phrase response framework
- Chapter 3 builds the tiered after-hours pricing matrix that separates 8 PM jobs from 2 AM jobs
- Chapter 4 walks the smart-lock upgrade upsell that turns \$95 lockouts into \$485 installations
- Chapter 5 opens commercial accounts with property managers, HOAs, and corporate facilities
- Chapter 6 routes emergency calls through optimization software so you stop driving past callers
- Chapter 7 dismantles the \$15 bait-and-switch in your Google Ads without joining the scam yourself
- Chapter 8 inventories the van for what you actually need on board to close 95% of calls

The end state for a solo operator running this engine for six months: \$9,000–\$14,000/mo gross, 38–46 hours per week, a roster of three to seven recurring commercial accounts producing \$3,000–\$6,000/mo on autopilot, and the ability to decline a 22-mile \$45 lockout because three better jobs are queued ahead of it.

Case Study

The Tucson Locksmith Who Restructured His First Page

A licensed Arizona locksmith was averaging \$58 per ticket across 48 monthly jobs — \$2,780/mo gross, \$1,650 net after fuel, supplies, and license fees. He had a \$15 bait-on-call landing page running \$22/day on Google Ads, converting at 14% but with a 38% chargeback rate from customers who arrived to find the price was actually \$165. We rebuilt the intake script around the six segments above, killed the bait-and-switch landing page (replacing it with the transparent-pricing page in Chapter 7), and rewrote his after-hours pricing tier. His call conversion dropped from 32% to 24%. His chargebacks dropped to under 3%. His average ticket rose from \$58 to \$148. Five months later he was averaging \$8,200/mo gross on the same 44 weekly hours. He had not changed his lock-picking skill. He had changed the 90 seconds before the lock.

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