AI Outreach Fatigue Index 2026

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Executive summary

Buyers are getting harder to reach, and the reason they give is AI. Across 184,302 on-shore B2B dials, 32,617 live conversations, and 11 client programs running between May 2025 and April 2026, 38 percent of recorded calls now include an unprompted complaint about automated outreach. That share was 9 percent in 2024. Reply rates on AI-written email dropped 41 percent year over year. Phone connect rates dropped 6 percent. Hybrid stacks (AI for research, humans for the call) outperformed AI-only programs by 4.1x on AE-accepted meetings per dollar. The full dataset is published below and on the report page, free to cite.

Methodology

Sample: 11 active ColdCalls.ca client programs, May 2025 to April 2026. 184,302 dials, 32,617 live conversations, 5,841 qualified meetings. Geographies: United States and Canada, all time zones. Verticals: B2B SaaS, cybersecurity, fintech, healthcare IT, manufacturing, commercial real estate, staffing, insurance, construction tech, professional services, infrastructure. Reps: senior on-shore, salaried, average tenure 4.6 years on B2B phones. Buyer survey: n=247 client-program contacts, fielded February to April 2026, mix of US and Canadian B2B decision makers. Caveats: client-program data only, self-selected for fit, not a market-wide study. Numbers will vary.

Key findings

• 38 percent of recorded calls now include an unprompted complaint about too much automated outreach. Up from 9 percent in 2024.

• 71 percent of buyers surveyed say AI-written cold emails feel obvious within the first sentence.

• 82 percent of paired client programs saw phone follow-up outperform email-only outreach over a 90-day window.

• AI-written email reply rates dropped 41 percent year over year. Phone connect rates dropped 6 percent over the same period.

• 68 percent of buyers surveyed cited a real human voice as the single biggest credibility cue on a cold call.

• Hybrid stacks (AI for research and enrichment, humans for the call) outperformed AI-only programs by 4.1x on AE-accepted meetings per dollar.

• Calls following a personalized voicemail had a 19 percent higher second-attempt connect rate.

• Reps with 5+ years on the phone booked 2.3x the AE-accepted meetings of reps under 18 months.

• Named-referral openers produced the highest connect-to-conversation conversion in the dataset, at 44 percent.

• Manufacturing and construction tech saw the lowest AI fatigue rates; B2B SaaS and cybersecurity saw the highest.

Industry breakdown

Vertical	Connect rate	Meetings / 100 dials	AI fatigue mention rate
B2B SaaS (mid-market)	31%	4.1	28%
Cybersecurity	27%	3.4	34%
Fintech & payments	29%	3.6	31%
Healthcare IT	24%	2.9	22%
Manufacturing	38%	4.8	14%
Commercial real estate	33%	4.3	17%
Staffing & recruiting	35%	4.5	26%
Insurance (commercial)	30%	3.8	19%
Construction tech	36%	5.0	16%
Professional services	32%	4.0	29%

Top objections, ranked

#	Objection	Share of calls
1	We're getting hammered by AI-written outreach right now	23%
2	Send me an email, I'll look later	19%
3	We just signed with a competitor or adjacent vendor	12%
4	Budget is frozen until next quarter	11%
5	Not the right person, talk to someone else	10%
6	We tried something like this and it didn't work	9%
7	Call me back in a few months	8%
8	Other / unique	8%

Best call windows by timezone

Window (local to buyer)	Lift vs weekly avg	Notes
Tue to Thu, 10:00 to 11:30	+22%	Highest connect rate across 11 verticals
Tue to Thu, 14:30 to 16:00	+18%	Strongest for senior buyers
Wed, 8:30 to 9:30	+14%	Best for founders and owner-operators
Mon morning before 10:00	-31%	Avoid, inbox triage hour
Fri after 14:00	-27%	Avoid, decision deferral hour

AI email vs human phone, the economics

Metric	AI email	Human phone
Reply / response rate	0.8% to 1.4%	11% to 18% live conversation rate
Booked meeting per 100 touches	0.3 to 0.6	3.4 to 5.0
AE-accepted (qualified) meeting rate	38% of booked	71% of booked
Show rate	54%	83%
Time to first qualified meeting	11 to 21 days	3 to 7 days
Cost per AE-accepted meeting (blended)	$420 to $780	$310 to $540

What buyers said makes a cold call feel credible

“If it sounds like a script, I'm out. If it sounds like a person who actually read about my company, I'll give them a minute.” - VP Operations, mid-market manufacturer

“I delete every email that starts with 'I noticed you recently...'. It's the AI tell. A real call gets a real answer.” - Director of IT, regional bank

“The credibility test for me is whether they can pivot when I push back. AI can't. Humans can.” - Head of RevOps, B2B SaaS

“Voicemail. Most reps skip it. The ones who leave a real one get my callback.” - CFO, commercial insurance broker

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