



APPWT WEB & AI SOLUTIONS

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The AppWT 184 AI Receptionists Selection Guide

AI Receptionist

Written by Anthony “Tony” Paris

AppWT Web & AI Solutions (AppWT LLC, a family company)



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A NOTE ON SPELLING

This manual is read in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. Where a word is spelled differently in different countries, both spellings appear the first time the word is used, like color/colour. After that, one spelling is used so the page stays easy to read.

HOW TO USE THE TECHNICAL NOTES

Smaller italic notes marked *For your tech person* hold the deeper detail: exact settings, file names and commands. You can skip every one of them and the manual still makes complete sense. Hand them to whoever looks after your website.

IMPORTANT

This manual describes security practices that AppWT uses and recommends. It is written as general guidance for business owners. It is not legal advice, and it is not a guarantee that any system cannot be attacked. Security reduces risk. No honest provider will promise to remove risk entirely.

Every incident described in this manual comes from work AppWT actually performed. Client identities are deliberately withheld, because a client's security incident is not ours to publish. Where the business involved is AppWT itself, we name ourselves.

A Note From Tony

The question that started this book was asked by a man who owned two vans and a heating business. He had installed an AI receptionist six weeks earlier and it was not working. He wanted to know which platform to move to. I asked him to send me twenty transcripts instead.

The transcripts were fine. The agent was polite, quick and grammatical. It was also asking customers with no hot water what outcome they were hoping for. He had picked a personality built for creative work, because he liked the name and the photograph on the card. The platform was not his problem. The hire was.

I have been building and fixing websites for small businesses since 1997, and I have watched a lot of technology arrive. This one arrived differently. A receptionist that answers in seconds, all night, every night, becomes the most consistent voice a small business has, usually within a month and usually without anybody deciding that it should. It meets more customers than the owner does. Almost nobody chooses it with the care they would give to hiring a Saturday assistant.

So this is a selection guide, and it is written the way a hiring process should run. Measure the job first. Read the qualifications rather than the photograph. Shortlist three. Test them against real questions. Score the test blind. Then build the knowledge behind whoever wins, because a well-chosen personality with nothing to say is a well-mannered agent inventing facts about your business at three in the morning.

The catalog at the center/centre of this book holds 184 named personalities. I have counted them, and the number in the title is the real one. They are organized into seven families, each anchored by a root personality whose expertise and phrasing set the family's character, with twenty-four members carrying each family tag, plus nine specialists built for particular jobs. Every record carries the same ten fields. Chapter two walks all ten, and chapter four explains why the structure turns an overwhelming list into a choice between about three.

Here is what I promise. Every chapter produces something written down. An audit of what your customers actually contact you about. A scored shortlist. An answer bank in your customers' own words. A set of rules about what your agent may never say. A weekly sheet with five numbers on it. Every figure in those documents will be yours, measured from your own business.

Here is what I will not promise. There is no conversion rate in this book, no benchmark resolution figure and no payback period, because those depend on your prices, your local market and how many of your customers were going to buy anyway. I have not seen any of that from here. Where a number would be convenient and I cannot stand behind it, I have written the mechanism instead. You will find worked examples throughout, and every one of them uses a generic business with figures that belong to that example alone.

One boundary runs through the whole book. Chapter twelve is about disclosure, consent, accessibility and the claims a fluent agent will make without noticing. It is business information and it is not legal advice. Rules on recording, consent, retention and AI disclosure differ by state and by country, and several have changed more than once in recent years. Confirm the current position for the places your customers live, with a licensed attorney or a qualified adviser, before you go live rather than after.

Work Part One in order and do not skip the audit in chapter three. Two ordinary weeks, logged as it happens, one line per contact. Owners resist it because it asks for a spreadsheet instead of a decision. Skip it and every later choice in this book gets made on a feeling, and a feeling about your own customers is wrong in a direction you cannot see. After Part One you can read out of order and go at whatever is in front of you.

Some of what follows will not be comfortable. The personality you liked in the first ten seconds may come last in a scored test. Your dominant customer intent may not be the one your business is built around. A monthly consistency check will usually find a fact that has been wrong somewhere for months. Those are ordinary findings rather than failures, and every one of them is cheaper to find in a transcript than in a review.

Anthony “Tony” Paris

Founder, AppWT Web & AI Solutions · Livonia, Michigan

How to Use This Manual

This manual is built to be worked with a spreadsheet open beside it. Keep one folder, on paper or on screen, and put every output into it as you go. Fourteen chapters produce a small stack of short documents, and the last chapter turns them into one dated plan.

The parts

Part One settles what you are choosing and what you are choosing it for. Chapter 1 explains why the personality decision is a hiring decision. Chapter 2 opens a personality record and walks its ten fields, so you can read a listing instead of admiring it. Chapter 3 runs the two-week intent audit that every later chapter depends on. Chapter 4 shows how 184 names are organized into seven families, which is what makes the choice manageable.

Part Two does the matching. Chapter 5 converts your trade into an intent pattern and applies the two-sided test of coverage and restraint. Chapter 6 covers tone, including the three-word rule and the complaint test that exposes a tone nothing else will. Chapter 7 designs the first two turns around your dominant intent. Chapter 8 runs a scored head-to-head between three finalists, built from your own questions and marked blind.

Part Three is everything after the choice. Chapter 9 builds the answer bank, which is the real product. Chapter 10 aligns your site, your structured data, your map profile and your receptionist on the same facts. Chapter 11 connects conversations to bookings through intake, transfer and follow-up. Chapter 12 sets the disclosure, consent, accessibility and claim rules. Chapter 13 gives you five numbers and a weekly half hour. Chapter 14 covers shifts, locations and languages, and closes with a ninety-day plan you date and sign.

The boxes, and what each one means

DO THIS TODAY

A gold box is one action you can finish now. If you only ever act on the gold boxes, you will still be far safer than when you started.

FROM OUR FILES

A dark box is a real incident from AppWT work. Nothing in these boxes is invented. Where a detail was never verified, we say so rather than fill the gap.

FOR YOUR TECH PERSON

A smaller italic note like this one carries the professional detail: exact file names, headers, settings and commands. Skip every one and the manual still reads completely. Forward them to your web person.

The tables, the sheets and the two code blocks

There is almost no code in this book. The two code blocks are column headings for things you build in any spreadsheet you already use: the blind score sheet in chapter 8, and the list of fields that must match across every surface in chapter 10. Type them in and fill them yourself. The tables are meant to be worked from rather than read past, and several of them, such as the intent buckets in chapter 3 and the claim boundaries in chapter 12, are worth copying straight into your own notes.

The technical notes are short and practical. They cover things like reading a fact from a live source rather than pasting a copy, generating your question-and-answer structured data from the same file that feeds the answer bank, and why a name and a face come from the same record key. Skipping one never breaks a chapter. Hand it to whoever helps with your site, then check the result yourself.

What this book does not promise, and does not cover

No conversion rate, no resolution benchmark and no payback period appear anywhere, because all three depend on a market I have not seen. Nothing here is legal advice, and chapter 12 stops and says so. This is a selection and operating guide for a chat receptionist, so it does not cover telephony setup, voice cloning, or the engineering of a self-hosted stack. Search visibility, email marketing and map profile work each belong to separate AppWT titles, and this one points at them rather than repeating them badly.

If you only have one afternoon

Do four things, in this order. Read twenty of your own transcripts, or twenty of last month's inbound messages if you have no agent yet, and note what people actually wanted. Write your twenty most frequent answers in your customers' words. Write the one sentence your agent says when it must refuse, including the next step it offers. Then test every transfer route from a phone that is not linked to your business, at a time you are normally closed. All four are free, all four are quick, and between them they close the leaks that cost small businesses the most. Come back for the two-week audit in chapter 3 when you have a longer stretch.

Where to keep the outputs

Keep one folder and treat it as part of the business. The audit sheets, the scored test with its losing transcripts, the answer bank, the price rule, the refusal sentence, the boundary list, the surface list and the weekly metrics sheet all live in it, each dated. Put every recurring date on one calendar rather than several, because the weekly transcript read, the monthly consistency check, the quarterly re-audit and the twice-yearly rules review all belong to the same person. Keep the old versions too, since last quarter's audit is the only thing that tells you whether this quarter's change worked.

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PART ONE

The Decision Behind the Greeting

Choosing an AI receptionist is a hiring decision, and hiring decisions start with a job description rather than a photograph. These four chapters explain what a named personality contains, measure what your own customers actually contact you about, and show how a catalog of 184 names collapses into a choice between about three.



The Greeting Is a Business Decision

Chapter 1. Why the personality you pick is a hiring choice, not a decorating choice

An AI receptionist meets more of your customers than anyone on your payroll. This chapter shows what the personality choice actually controls, names the four ways the choice goes wrong, and sets out the three inputs that decide a good match: industry, tone and customer intent.

A two-chair salon puts a chat receptionist on its website. The owner opens the catalog, scrolls the faces, and picks one because the name is pretty and the photograph looks friendly. Setup takes twenty minutes. Over the next month the widget holds around forty conversations a week. People say hello. They ask a question. They get an answer that is polite, correct and slightly beside the point. Then they close the tab. At the end of the month the owner counts three bookings. Nothing broke. No error appeared in any log. The receptionist worked exactly as built, and it built almost nothing.

That is not a technology failure. It is a hiring failure. The owner picked a face when the job called for a booker. If a human applicant had walked in, no owner would hire on the photograph alone. They would ask what the person can do, how they talk to a stranger who is annoyed, and whether they can get a name and a phone number into the diary without being told twice. A named AI personality answers all three of those questions before you install it. Almost nobody reads the answers.

The First Employee Every Customer Meets

Think about who actually greets your customers now. If you run a small business, the answer is usually whoever is nearest the phone. That person changes by the hour. They are sometimes excellent and sometimes distracted. They are never available at eleven at night, and eleven at night is when a good share of website messages get written. A receptionist that answers every message inside a few seconds, every hour, will meet more of your customers in a month than any single member of staff. That makes it the most consistent voice your business has, whether or not you chose that voice on purpose.

FOR YOUR TECH PERSON

The chat widget loads on every page, so measure page weight before and after you add it. A launcher that blocks first paint costs you visitors who never see the greeting. Load it after the main content, and confirm the page still renders correctly with the script blocked.

Consistency cuts both ways. A well-matched personality repeats the right first move hundreds of times without getting tired of it. A badly matched one repeats the wrong first move just as reliably. There is no bad day and no good day, only the pattern you installed. That is why the choice deserves an hour of thought rather than the two minutes most people give it, and why the rest of this book treats it as a hiring process with a shortlist, a test and a score sheet.

You would not hire a receptionist from a photograph. Do not install one that way either.

Three Inputs, and Most Buyers Use One

A good match comes from three inputs, and they carry roughly equal weight. The first is your industry, which is really a shorthand for what your customers are trying to do when they contact you. The second is tone, meaning how the words land on somebody who is in a hurry, in pain, or already irritated. The third is customer intent, which is the single thing the largest share of your visitors want in the first thirty seconds. Most buyers use only the first, and many use none of them. They pick the personality they would enjoy talking to, which is a reasonable instinct and the wrong question. You are not the customer.

The three inputs are not interchangeable. A personality can match your industry perfectly and still fail because its tone is wrong for a customer in distress. It can have exactly the right tone and still fail because it answers questions when the job was to book appointments. Getting two out of three produces a receptionist that feels almost right, which is harder to diagnose than one that is obviously wrong. Nobody complains about almost right. They just stop replying.

FOR YOUR TECH PERSON

Check that transcripts export as plain CSV or JSON with timestamps before you commit to a platform. Every measurement in this book reads from that export rather than from a dashboard, and a platform you cannot export from is a platform you cannot audit.

WHAT WENT WRONG	WHAT YOU SEE IN THE TRANSCRIPTS	THE REAL CAUSE	FIXED IN
Wrong intent	Long, accurate answers, then the visitor leaves without booking	The personality was built to inform when your customers came to book	Chapters 3 and 7
Wrong tone	Short replies from the visitor, then silence, usually on difficult topics	The greeting style and tone words suit a calm buyer, not an upset one	Chapter 6
Wrong expertise	The agent hands off, apologizes/apologises, or gives a vague answer to your most common question	The expertise tags do not cover the work your customers actually bring	Chapters 4 and 5
Nothing to say	Correct manner, wrong facts, or a confident answer that is simply invented	The personality was installed without an answer bank behind it	Chapters 9 and 10

FORTY CONVERSATIONS A WEEK AND THREE BOOKINGS

The two-chair salon from the opening ran the audit in chapter three before changing anything. Two weeks of logging showed the pattern. Of roughly eighty conversations, fifty-two opened with a version of the same request: can I get in this week, and with whom. Nineteen asked about price for a named service. Nine were existing clients changing an appointment. The rest were suppliers and wrong numbers. So sixty-five per cent of all traffic arrived wanting to book, and the installed personality was built around explaining services. It explained beautifully. It answered the price question with a range and a helpful note about consultations. It almost never asked for a name and a preferred day, because that was not its job. The owner swapped to a personality whose expertise covered booking and getting started, and rewrote the first branch of the conversation to offer two specific times instead of a menu. The traffic did not change. The transcripts did. Those are that salon's numbers, taken from its own log. The method is the part that carries over to yours.

What This Book Does, in Order

The order matters, because each step needs the output of the one before it. Part One measures your own front desk and explains how the catalog is organized/organised, so you know what you are choosing between. Part Two matches a personality to that measurement across industry, tone and intent, then tests three finalists against your own questions. Part Three builds the answer bank behind the personality, connects the conversation to a booking or a callback, sets the rules that keep you out of trouble, and puts five numbers on a weekly review.

1. Measure what your customers actually ask for, over two ordinary weeks, written down as it happens.
2. Learn what a named personality contains, so you can read a listing instead of admiring it.
3. Match on the dominant intent first, then industry fit, then tone.
4. Shortlist three candidates and test them against ten questions taken from your own log.
5. Build the answer bank from the same log, in your customers' words rather than your own.
6. Connect the conversation to a diary entry, a record and a follow-up, so nothing ends in a transcript alone.
7. Set the disclosure, consent and refusal rules before the first real customer arrives.
8. Count five numbers every week and read five transcripts, forever.

DO NOT PICK FROM THE PHOTOGRAPH

Cover the names and the pictures. Read only the role, the expertise tags and the tone words. Pick your shortlist from those three fields alone, and reveal the names afterwards. If your favorite/favourite personality survives that test, keep it with confidence. If it does not, you have just avoided the most common and most expensive mistake in this whole book.

One more thing before the work starts. Nothing in this book promises a conversion rate, a booking figure or a payback period, because those depend on your prices, your local market and your competition, none of which are visible from here. What the book does promise is a method with a written output at every stage. You will finish with an audit of your own traffic, a scored shortlist, an answer bank, a set of rules and a weekly review. Every number in those documents will be yours, measured from your own business, which is the only kind of number worth making a decision on.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- An AI receptionist becomes the most consistent voice in your business, so the personality you install is a hiring decision.
- Three inputs decide the match: your industry, the tone your customers need, and the intent most of them arrive with.
- Picking on the name and photograph is the most common mistake, because you are not the customer.
- A personality that is almost right is harder to spot than one that is obviously wrong, since nobody complains, they simply stop replying.
- Cover the names and choose your shortlist from role, expertise and tone alone, then reveal the names afterwards.
- Measure your own traffic before you choose anything, because every later step needs that measurement as its input.



Inside a Named Personality: The Ten Fields

Chapter 2. What a personality record actually contains, and what each field controls in a real conversation

Every named personality in the catalog is a record with ten fields, and each field changes something a customer can hear. This chapter walks the fields one at a time, shows which ones do the heavy lifting, and gives you a way to read a listing the way a hiring manager reads an application.

A named personality is not a mood or a color/colour scheme. It is a structured record, and every field in it changes the words a customer receives. Once you can read the record, the catalog stops being a wall of faces and becomes a list of job candidates with published qualifications. The whole selection method in this book rests on that shift, so it is worth twenty minutes to learn the fields properly.

Each record in the AppWT receptionist catalog carries the same ten fields. Name and full name. Heritage, age and location. Role. Tone. Greeting style. Signature phrases. Expertise tags. Three of those fields do most of the work in an actual conversation, three of them set the surface identity, and the rest sit in between. Knowing which is which stops you weighing the wrong ones.

The Ten Fields and What Each One Decides

FIELD	WHAT IT CONTROLS IN THE CONVERSATION	WHAT GOES WRONG WHEN YOU IGNORE IT
Name and full name	How the agent introduces itself and how customers refer back to it	A name that does not suit your customers reads as borrowed from another business

FIELD	WHAT IT CONTROLS IN THE CONVERSATION	WHAT GOES WRONG WHEN YOU IGNORE IT
Heritage	Cultural background in the written identity, visible on a profile card	A mismatch with the community you serve looks careless rather than welcoming
Age	The implied experience level behind the wording	A very young identity paired with authoritative advice reads as inconsistent
Location	Where the identity is based, which customers do notice and sometimes ask about	A far-away location invites a question you have not decided how to answer
Role	The job the personality believes it holds, which shapes what it offers to do next	The agent volunteers help you do not sell and misses the help you do
Tone	Sentence length, warmth and how directly it gets to the point	Correct answers that land badly on an upset or hurried customer
Greeting style	The first eight to twelve words, before the customer has said anything	The opening sets an expectation the rest of the conversation cannot meet
Signature phrases	Three to five sentences that recur, and that customers remember	The agent sounds generic, or repeats a phrase that does not fit your trade
Expertise tags	Which topics the agent leans into and which it hands off	Your most common question falls outside every tag the personality holds

The Three Fields That Do the Heavy Lifting

Expertise tags come first. They are the closest thing to a job description. A record tagged with troubleshooting, integrations and system architecture will steer a conversation toward diagnosis. A record tagged with onboarding, pricing and getting started will steer the same opening message toward a first appointment. Neither is better. They are different jobs, and your audit in the next chapter tells you which job you are hiring for.