DM AUTO-REPLY: ANSWER EVERY MESSAGE, DAY AND NIGHT

A default reply for messages nothing else answers, a welcome for first messages, a different answer when you are closed, and a clean handover to your team.

Updated October 17, 2026 · chatinflow.com/flows/inbox-auto-reply

The worst reply a customer can get is none. A question about stock at 23:00, a price question on a Sunday, a "are you open today?" while the team is busy: each one waits, and some of them go to the business that answered first. An inbox auto-reply makes sure every message gets something useful at once, without stepping on the answers your team and your keyword automations already give. This guide sets one up step by step: the default reply for messages nothing else answers, a welcome for first messages, a different answer outside business hours, and the rules that hand the chat back to a person the moment they reply.

Key points

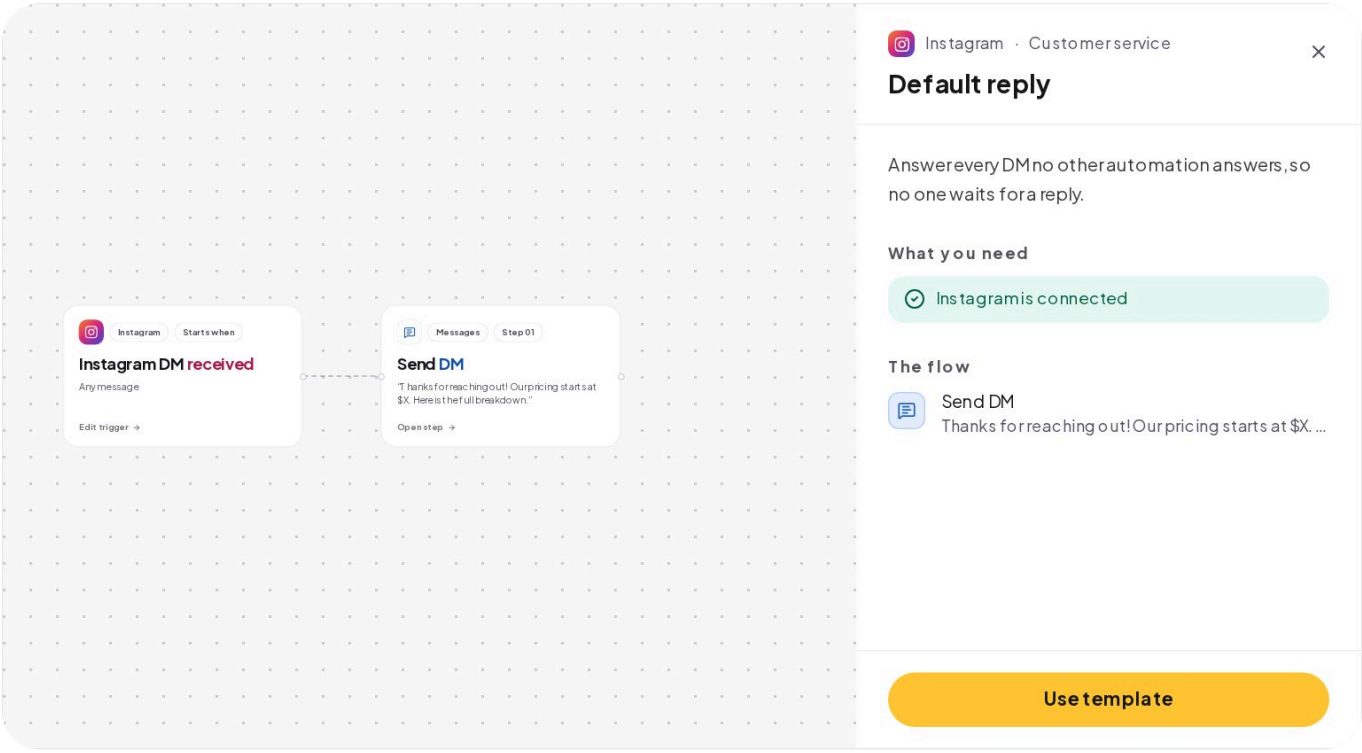
- A DM trigger set to Any message works as the default reply: it answers only the messages no other automation matches, so your keyword replies still go first.
- Only the first message of a conversation turns it into a welcome that does not repeat.
- A schedule with weekly hours and holidays, or the Business hours condition in the flow, changes what it says when you are closed.
- When a teammate replies in the inbox, the automation in that chat stops and the bot stays quiet for the time you set, 30 minutes unless you change it.
- On WhatsApp, a reply after 24 hours without a customer message must be a template Meta has approved.

HOW THE FLOW WORKS

Step	What happens	Built with
1. The message	A DM nothing else answered	A DM trigger set to Any message
2. Open or closed?	The flow checks your business hours	The Business hours condition
3. The answer	The most useful reply for the moment	Send DM with buttons, or the AI agent
4. The away message	When you are closed, when you will be back	Send DM on the closed path
5. The team	A teammate replies, and the bot steps aside	The inbox

STEP 1: START FROM THE DEFAULT REPLY TEMPLATE

Open **Automations** and search the gallery for "default". **Default reply** answers every DM no other automation answers, so no one waits for a reply.

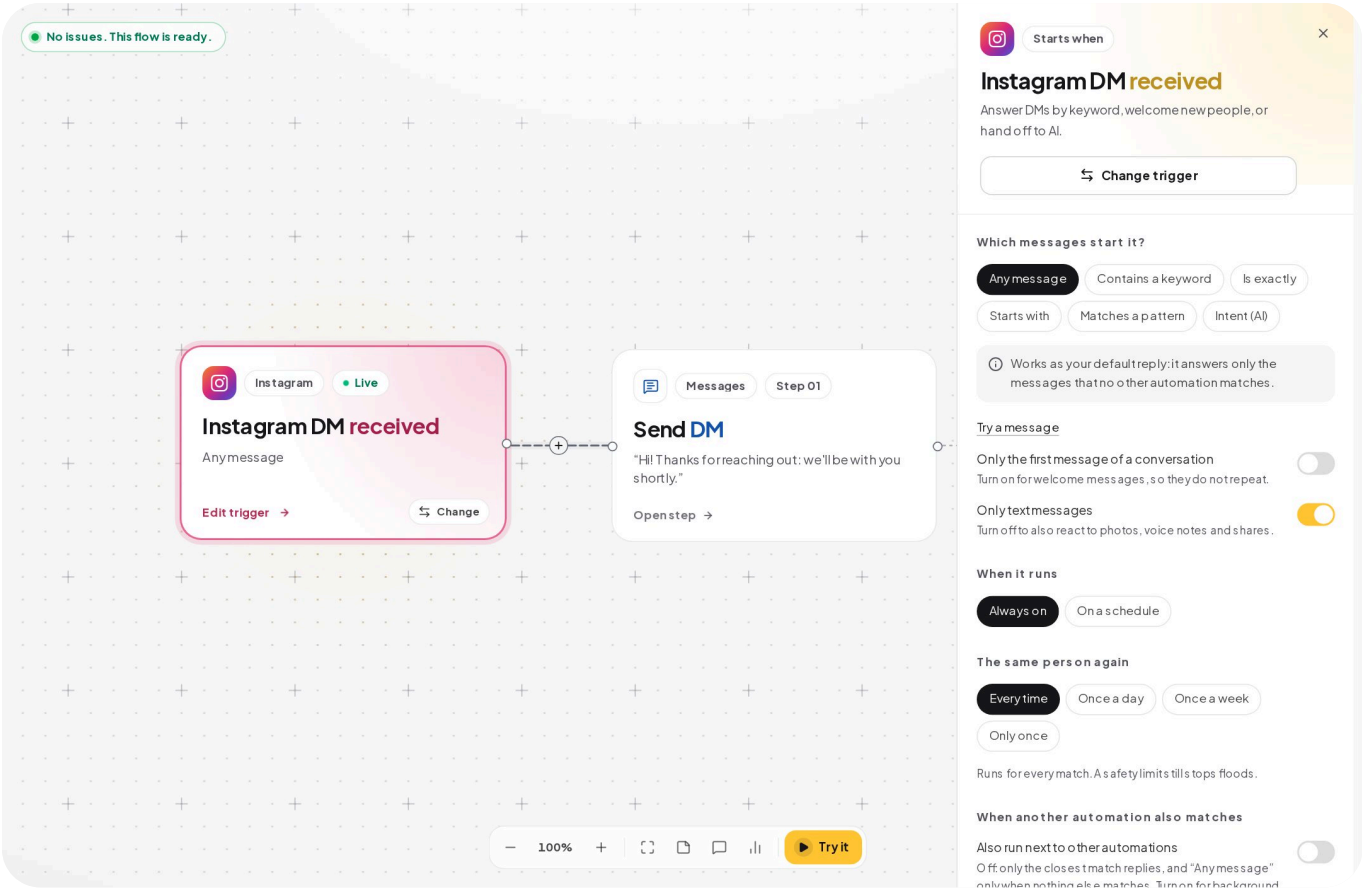


Default reply: one answer for every DM nothing else answered.

Press **Use template** and replace the example text with your own. A good default reply does three things: it thanks the person, it answers the question most people ask, and it offers the next step with buttons.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND ANY MESSAGE

Open the DM trigger. Set to **Any message**, it works as your default reply: the panel says it answers only the messages that no other automation matches.



Any message becomes the default reply, so keyword automations still answer first.

That order is what keeps the inbox sane:

1. **Keyword automations** answer when their word matches: PRICE, HOURS, BOOK.
2. **Intent (AI)**, if you use it, picks an automation for a message no keyword matched.
3. **Any message** answers everything else.

Two switches change who it answers:

- **Only the first message of a conversation** turns it into a welcome, so a returning customer is not greeted again and again.
- **Only text messages** leaves photos, voice notes and stickers to your team.

STEP 3: WRITE A REPLY THAT ACTUALLY HELPS

"Thanks, we'll get back to you" helps nobody at 23:00. A useful default reply answers before it promises:

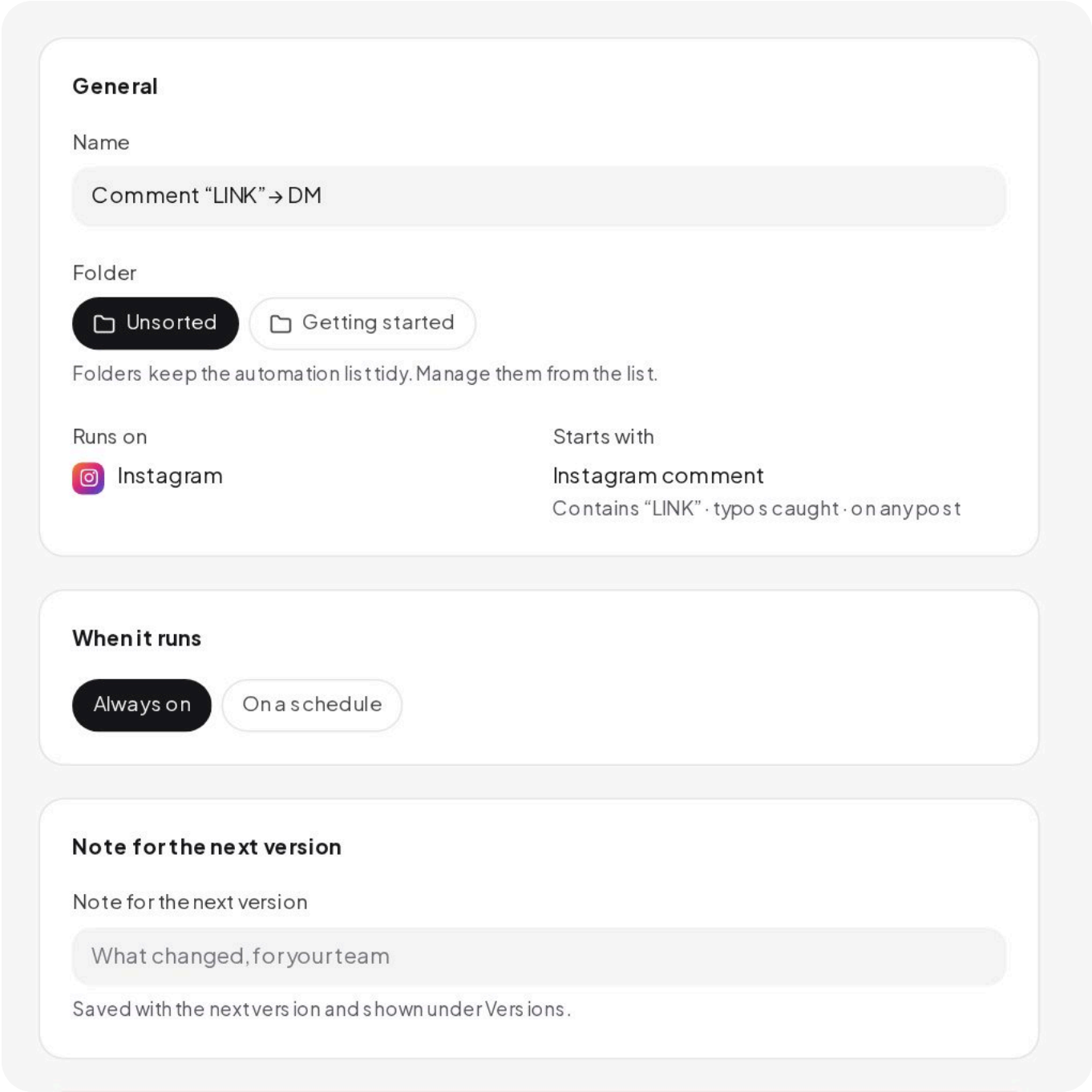
> "Hi {first name}! Thanks for your message. Most people ask about prices and opening hours, so here they are: prices start at $45, and we're open Monday to Saturday, 9:00 to 19:00. Pick an option below, or just write your question and the team will answer."

with buttons such as **Prices**, **Book a time** and **Talk to a person**. Each button starts its own small automation, so the person gets an answer in one tap instead of waiting for a person.

STEP 4: ANSWER DIFFERENTLY WHEN YOU ARE CLOSED

There are two ways to change the reply outside your hours.

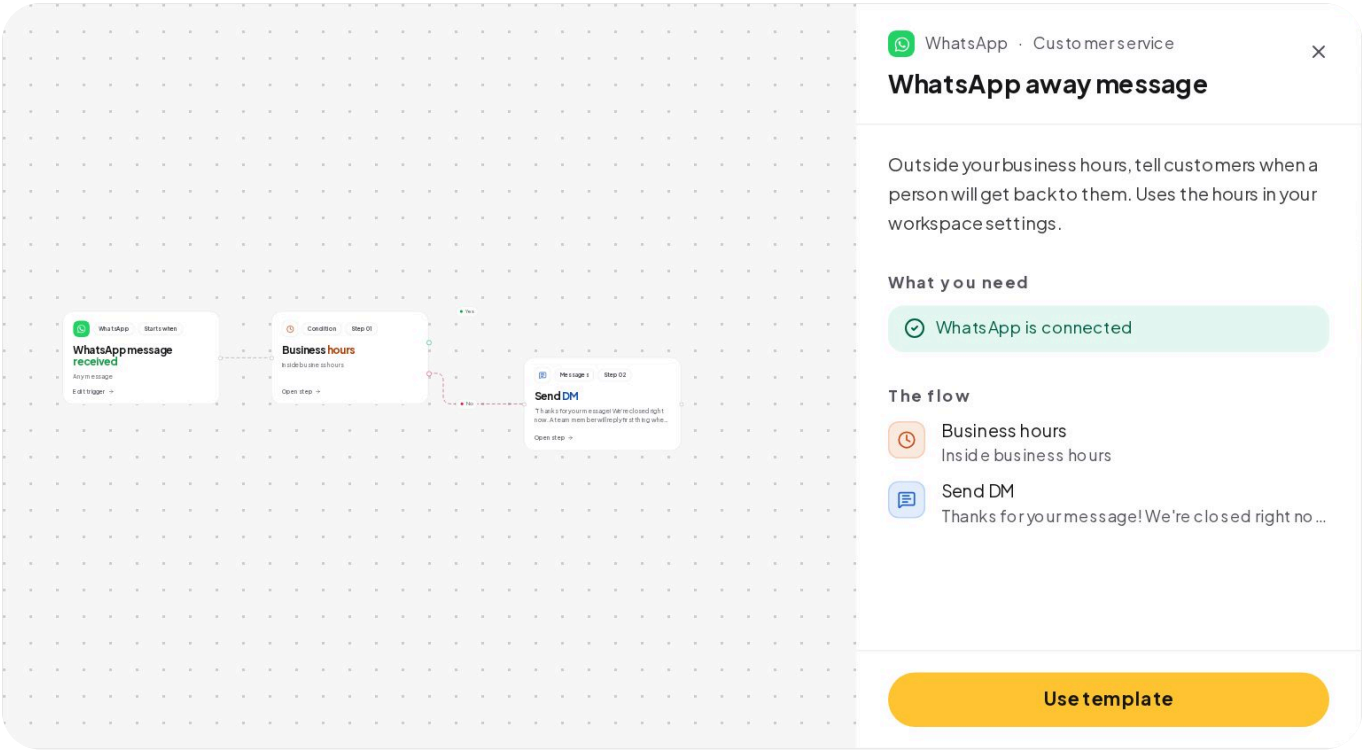
A schedule on the automation. Open the automation's settings and choose **On a schedule** instead of Always on. Set weekly hours in your business time zone, a start and end date if you like, and holidays: skip them, or run only on them. Your workspace's business calendar and up to 100 dates of the automation's own can be used.



Always on or on a schedule, with holidays to skip.

A condition in the flow. The **Business hours** condition checks whether you are open right now, using the hours in your workspace settings, and gives the flow two paths: open and closed. One automation then says "a teammate will reply shortly" during the day and "we're closed, we'll reply first thing at 9:00" at night.

For WhatsApp, the **WhatsApp away message** template does exactly that: outside your business hours, it tells customers when a person will get back to them.



WhatsApp away message: a Business hours condition and the closed reply.

STEP 5: LET AI HANDLE THE OPEN QUESTIONS

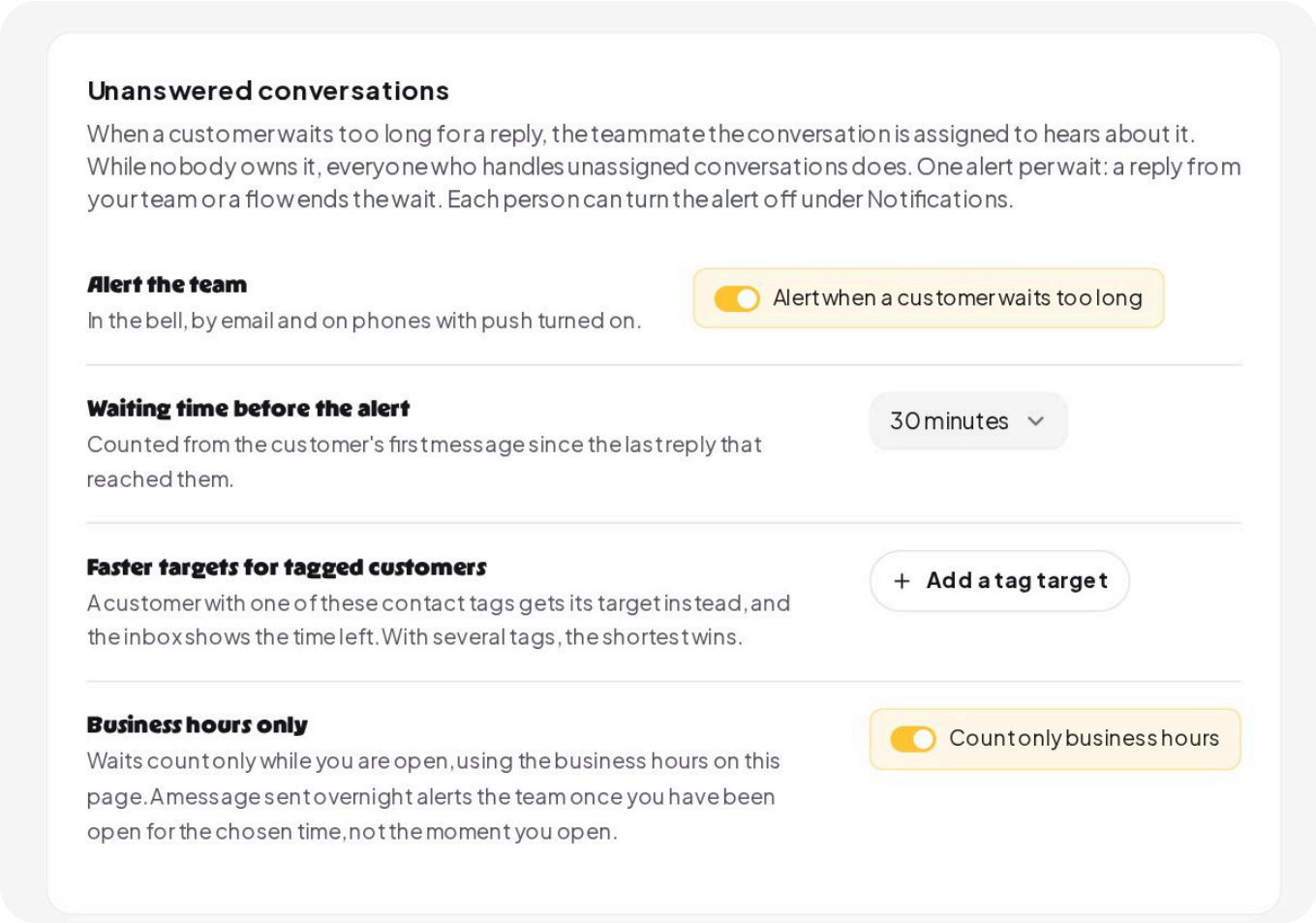
A fixed reply covers the common questions. For the rest, an **AI agent** step on a paid plan answers from the sources you add, such as your pricing page, your shipping page or a short text with the facts, on your own OpenAI, Anthropic, Google Gemini or Azure OpenAI key. When the answer is not in your sources, or the customer asks for a person, the agent takes its other path, which you connect to Notify the team.

Put AI after your keywords, not in front of them. A keyword answer costs nothing and says exactly what you wrote.

STEP 6: HAND OVER TO YOUR TEAM CLEANLY

An auto-reply should never argue with a person. When a teammate replies in the inbox, the automation running in that chat stops, and the bot stays quiet for the time you set under **Settings, Inbox**, 30 minutes unless you change it. **Pause the bot** at the top of a conversation starts that quiet time before you type, for 30 minutes, 1 hour or 24 hours.

To make sure no one waits too long once the auto-reply has answered, turn on **Unanswered conversations** in the same settings: when a customer waits longer than the time you choose for a reply, the assigned teammate hears about it.



Alert the assigned teammate when a customer waits too long. Demo workspace.

THREE DEFAULT REPLIES TO ADAPT

A store. "Thanks for writing, {first name}! Orders ship within 2 working days, and returns are free for 30 days. Looking for something? Tap Shop, Track my order or Talk to us."

A service business. "Hi! We're open Monday to Saturday, 9:00 to 19:00, and you can book online in a minute. Tap Book a time, Prices or Ask a question."

A creator. "Thanks for the message! For brand deals, tap Work with me. For my free guide, tap Guide. Everything else, I read it all, just slower."

Each one answers before it promises, gives three choices and sounds like the business, which is what makes people keep reading. Rewrite the example in your own words; the person reading it knows your voice from your posts.

Holidays and special days

Holidays are where auto-replies earn their keep. A few habits:

- **Add the dates once.** Holidays in your workspace's business calendar apply to every automation that follows it, and each automation can add its own dates on top.
- **Choose the mode.** Skip holidays, so the normal reply stays quiet, or run only on holidays, for a special "we're closed for the holidays" automation.
- **Say when you reopen.** "Back on 3 January" is better than "closed for the holidays".
- **Point to what still works.** Online booking, the shop, the order form: whatever does not need a person.

Step 7: check what it answered

Each automation's **Activity** tab lists every run: how it ended, how long it took and where it stopped. Read the messages that reached your default reply every week. Each one that keeps coming back deserves its own keyword automation with a precise answer, and your default reply gets shorter over time.

A worked example: a bakery's inbox

A bakery gets the same messages every day: are you open, do you have gluten-free bread, can I order a cake.

1. **Keywords first.** CAKE starts a cake order flow with the sizes and the order form; GLUTEN answers with the gluten-free list.
2. **The default reply** answers everything else with the opening hours, the address and three buttons: Order a cake, Today's bread, Talk to us.
3. **Outside hours**, the Business hours condition sends "We're closed right now, we open at 7:00. Leave your order and we'll confirm it in the morning."
4. **A teammate** answers the cake questions during the day, and the bot stays quiet while they do.

Messages at 22:00 get the hours and the cake form at once, and the morning shift starts with orders instead of questions.

Writing a good default reply

- **Answer the top question in the reply itself.** Prices, hours or delivery, whichever people ask most.
- **Offer buttons, not a wall of text.** Three choices are enough.
- **Say when a person will answer.** "Within the hour on weekdays" is honest and calms people down.
- **Keep it short.** It is read on a phone, often in a notification preview of two lines.
- **Change it with the season.** Holiday hours, a sale, a new product: the default reply is the first thing people see.

CHANNEL RULES WORTH KNOWING

Channel	Free reply window	After the window
Instagram	24 hours after their last message	No message until they write again
Messenger	24 hours after their last message	No message until they write again
WhatsApp	24 hours after their last message	Only a template Meta has approved
Telegram	No window for people who started your bot	Messages keep reaching them
Website chat	While the visitor is on your site	The request waits in the inbox

COMMON MISTAKES

- **An auto-reply that answers first.** Use Any message, so keywords and intents still win.
- **The same welcome every time.** Turn on Only the first message of a conversation.
- **"We'll get back to you" and nothing else.** Answer the common question in the reply.
- **No closed-hours message.** At night, say when you will be back.
- **Never reading what it caught.** The messages your default reply answers are your next keyword automations.

TERMS IN THIS GUIDE

- **Any message.** A DM trigger mode that works as the default reply, answering what no other automation matches.
- **Only the first message.** A trigger switch that runs the automation once at the start of a conversation.
- **Business hours condition.** A flow step that checks whether you are open now and gives the flow two paths.
- **Schedule.** Weekly hours, dates and holidays that decide when an automation can start.
- **Quiet time.** How long the bot stays silent in a chat after a teammate replies.
- **Unanswered conversations.** The inbox setting that alerts a teammate when a customer waits too long.

QUICK ANSWERS

Can I have different default replies per channel?

Yes. Each automation belongs to one channel's trigger, so Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and Telegram can each have their own default reply.

Will the auto-reply answer during a live chat with my team?

No. While the quiet time runs after a teammate's reply, automations for that contact are paused.

Does a schedule stop a flow that already started?

No. A schedule decides when an automation can start; a flow already running finishes its steps.

Can the auto-reply say who will answer?

Yes. Write it into the message, such as "Ana from our team replies on weekdays", and keep it true; when the team changes, change the reply.

What about voice notes?

Incoming voice notes are turned into text on our own servers, so automations can read their words. Turn on Only text messages if you would rather leave them to your team.

SOURCES

- **Messenger Platform and IG Messaging API policy**, Meta for Developers, on the 24-hour window.
- **Template fundamentals**, Meta for Developers, on WhatsApp templates outside the window.

DO IT IN SECONDS, FREE

chatinflow.com/flows/inbox-auto-reply