

AI chatbot vs. contact form + instant text back

Two front doors for the same website visitor. One gives a better answer in the moment. The other walks away with a phone number. Here's who each one catches and where each one loses the lead.

	SHORT FORM · TEXT IN UNDER A MINUTE Contact form + instant text back Name, phone, what's going on, zip	CHAT WIDGET · ANSWERS LIVE AI chatbot on your site Answers questions, offers to book
Who it catches	Visitors who already know what they need and want a time slot: the furnace that won't light, the gutter job, the pest treatment.	The half-ready visitor with a question first: service area, brands, permits, financing, a rough price range.
Best fit	Small teams, mostly-mobile traffic, urgent or routine jobs where speed decides who wins.	Big, slow decisions (roofs, pools, remodels, solar) and offices answering the same questions all day.
After the visitor leaves	The conversation is a text thread on their phone . Reminders and follow-ups land where they'll see them.	If the bot never got a phone number, the conversation is gone when the tab closes.
Where it loses	Visitors with a question who won't fill out a form just to ask it.	Mobile visitors who'd rather tap to call, and anyone the bot loops on ("Could you rephrase?").
What a bad setup costs	Eleven fields and "we'll reply in 1-2 business days." Mostly invisible: people just leave.	Invented prices and promises in your name , a bubble covering your call button, chat leads sent to an inbox nobody reads.
What to check	Four fields max. Text goes out in under a minute, 24/7. Consent-to-text line on the form.	Answers only from your info. Asks for a phone number in the first 2-3 messages. Hands off to a human. No auto-open on mobile.

9:15 PM · FURNACE WON'T LIGHT · FORM

9:15

Dana submits: "furnace clicks but won't ignite"

9:16

Text: "Is it clicking with no flame, or not doing anything at all?"

9:22

Booked for 8 AM. Reminder texted at 6 AM.

Job booked. The thread lives on her phone.

9:15 PM · FURNACE WON'T LIGHT · CHAT

9:15

Bot explains ignitor vs. flame sensor, confirms service area

9:19

"I'll check with my wife." Laptop closes. No phone number.

7:40 AM

He calls whichever company answers first.

Better answer, no way to follow up.

RUNNING BOTH?

Form submission

Chat with a phone number

Missed call

→

One follow-up layer: instant text + follow-up until they book or say no

Default for most local service businesses: start with a short form + instant text back. Add chat when your own leads show question-heavy traffic you're losing.