



Apple’s iOS 26 call screening update and SmartReach (formerly LiveVox): A deep dive

Apple’s iOS 26, released globally on September 15, 2025, is a meaningful update for its users. Among its new features are advanced options designed to help consumers more effectively screen unknown callers. In this brief, we will examine how these innovations work in practice, the implications for businesses that rely on outbound communication, some key recommendations, and the steps CXone Mpower SmartReach (formerly LiveVox) is taking to ensure your continued success.



Overview of iOS 26 call screening

With the introduction of Apple’s iOS 26, iPhone users have two new options for handling unknown calls. When enabled (under [Settings → Phone → Screen Unknown Callers](#)), these features intercept calls from numbers that are not in the user’s contact list (or recent outgoing calls) before the phone can ring:

- **“Ask Reason for Calling”:** This option sets the iPhone to [automatically answer](#) an incoming call from an unknown number and prompt the caller with a brief request (similar to a voicemail greeting) for their name and reason for calling. The response is transcribed in real time and the caller is placed on hold. Then the recipient’s phone rings and displays the transcribed text, allowing them to decide whether to accept the call or decline it. In essence, this is an on-device call screening feature, now built into Apple’s iOS.
- **“Silence”:** An evolution of the older iOS “Silence Unknown Callers” feature, this option silently sends any call from an unknown number [directly to voicemail](#). The caller is prompted to leave a message and the call is logged in the iPhone’s Recents list. The recipient can then listen to the voicemails or read their transcripts whenever it is convenient.

Users can also select **“Never”** in the settings, which means unknown calls will ring through as normal. However, given the nuisance of spam calls and Apple highlighting the new screening options during the upgrade, we expect that many consumers will opt in for peace of mind.

Effects on outbound calls and answering machine detection

For businesses that rely on outbound calling, the new iOS 26 features can change how calls are handled and affect internal workflows.

- **More frequent “automated answer” outcomes:** When an iPhone user has call screening enabled (either mode), your call will often not reach the person directly. Instead, it will be intercepted by the device. From the perspective of the CXone Mpower SmartReach dialing platform, such auto-attendant pickups are classified by our Answering Machine Detection (AMD) feature as answering machine responses and processed accordingly.
- **Standard handling of detected machines:** In a typical configuration, when the SmartReach system detects an answering machine, it will either hang up or play a pre-recorded voicemail message, depending on your campaign settings. Most of our clients have historically chosen to hang up on answering machines to avoid leaving a voicemail on every attempt. However, continuing with that approach can mean that a call being actively screened by an iOS 26 user will terminate prematurely.
- **An alternative—leave a message:** If your campaign or workflow includes leaving a message when an answering machine is detected, then you can take advantage of the iOS 26’s new features. Your system can play a preset audio message that will be recorded and transcribed by the iPhone, and

made available to the customer both in real time and through their recent calls list.

- **Caller ID authenticity has no impact:** In testing, branded or verified calls showed no advantage in bypassing the new iOS 26 filters and virtually all unsaved numbers are flagged as “Unknown” by default. Even if your outbound number is officially registered, has STIR/SHAKEN attestation, or displays a business Caller Name, the iPhone will still screen the call unless the number is in the user’s contacts or was recently dialed.
- **Variations by carrier:** Our internal tests (and external reports in the industry) have shown that there may be some variability in how calls are handled depending on the carrier network and the nature of the caller ID. Notably, we observed some cases in which calls from a local caller ID (a number that shares the recipient’s area code) were less likely to be subjected to the full screening process. At the very least, a local number looks more familiar and might encourage the consumer to answer or call back.

Outbound call strategies: implications and recommendations

Whether an unknown call is being screened with “Ask Reason” or sent directly to voicemail with “Silence,” anything the caller says is converted to text [as they speak](#) by Apple’s Live Voicemail feature. First introduced in iOS 17, Live Voicemail provides real-time transcription of voicemails (and now screening responses) with an interface resembling an

iMessage-style bubble or a real-time caption on the device screen. From the consumer's perspective, this is almost like receiving an SMS or chat message from the caller.

In practical terms, this means that a transcript of anything said when an outbound call to an iPhone is auto-answered—whether it's identifying yourself or leaving a message—appears on the user's screen almost immediately. As the text scrolls, they get a preview of who you are and why you're calling. This has two major implications for our clients and their outbound calls:

- **New opportunity to communicate:** Many businesses have been interested in sending SMS/text messages to reach customers who don't answer calls. Compliance constraints often make texting challenging in certain industries. However, with Live Voicemail transcription, a phone call can produce a written message delivered to the customer's device. In essence, a text—right there for the customer to read, even if they never pick up the call.
- **Real-time call screening:** If the user has "Ask Reason for Calling" turned on, then they can see your response transcribed in real time before deciding to accept the call. Even if the call went straight to voicemail (when "Silence" is activated), a customer actively looking at their phone can see a live transcript of the message as it is being left. This gives consumers the option to pick up mid-call, while your agent is still on the line.

The combination of Apple's new screening options in iOS 26 and their Live Voicemail blurs the line between a phone call and a text message. While this raises certain challenges

for traditional outbound calling, it also opens up creative avenues like reaching customers through transcribed snippets during outbound calls. It is critical to take these evolving options into account when planning your outreach campaign strategy.

- **Leverage voicemail transcription to your advantage:** Consider an approach where, at least on [final call attempts](#), you leave a voicemail (pre-recorded message) instead of disconnecting at the first sign of an answering machine.
- **Stick to no-message on early attempts:** If your compliance team prefers, you can continue to hang up on detection of the iOS screening or voicemail.
- **Prepare agents for live screened calls:** Make sure your agents are aware of real-time call screening and transcription, and craft appropriate scripts where relevant.
- **Use local caller ID numbers (but manage expectations):** Continue using local caller ID numbers, as they may provide a marginal benefit. However, manage expectations—they cannot be depended upon to consistently bypass Apple's screening capabilities.
- **Stay updated and engaged:** Apple's introduction of these features is a significant change, so take note of any updates. In addition, stay tuned as we continue our extensive testing and share insights as they emerge.

Ongoing testing and next steps

iOS 26's call screening and Live Voicemail features represent a notable shift in the consumer experience. We have already performed thorough tests to ensure our clients can continue to

effectively reach their customers, and we will continue to do so.

Moving forward, you can expect regular updates from NiCE regarding the impact of iOS 26, including data-driven insights and guidance on effective campaign tactics. We will be closely monitoring answer rates and overall statistics as more consumers upgrade to the latest iPhone system.

Our team is also actively exploring how best to adapt SmartReach technology to take full advantage of the iOS 26 update. We are currently working on enhancements for smart transfers of auto-dialed calls to live agents when they run into iOS 26 screening. Once this capability is fully enabled, the system will distinguish call interceptions by auto-attendants from standard answering machines and you will have the option to decide whether such calls should be transferred directly to agents or not.

As adoption of iOS 26 grows and familiarity increases, we will explore additional optimizations. These could include leaving tailored messages specifically for auto-attendant scenarios, transferring calls to designated groups of agents, and providing detailed reporting so you can track and analyze call outcomes within our reporting suite.

Overall, we are confident that with careful strategy adjustments—like smarter use of voicemails, potential agent intervention during screening, use of local numbers, and other best practices—you can continue to successfully engage customers even as the technology landscape evolves.

And we're here to support you every step of the way.



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