

# The secret phrases that get you past robot customer service

By Kim Komando, December 17, 2025

You're gonna love me for this. Say you're calling customer service because you need help. Maybe your bill is wrong, your service is down or you want a refund. Instead of a person, a cheerful AI voice answers and drops you into an endless loop of menus and misunderstood prompts. Now what?

That's not an accident. Many companies use what insiders call "frustration AI." The system is specifically designed to exhaust you until you hang up and walk away.

Not today.

## Use the magic words

You want a human. For starters, don't explain your issue. That's the trap. You need words the AI has been programmed to treat differently.

- **Nuclear phrases:** When the AI bot asks why you're calling, say, "I need to cancel my service" or "I am returning a call." The word cancel sets off alarms and often sends you straight to the customer retention team. Saying you're returning a call signals an existing issue the bot cannot track.
- **Power words:** When the system starts listing options, clearly say one word. "Supervisor." If that doesn't work, say, "I need to file a formal complaint." Most systems are not programmed to deal with complaints or supervisors. They escalate fast.
- **Technical bypass:** Asked to enter your account number? Press the pound key instead of numbers. Many older systems treat unexpected input as an error and default to a human.

## Go above the bots

If direct commands fail, you stop being helpful and start being confusing.

- **The Frustration Act:** When the AI bot asks a question, pause. Wait 10 seconds before answering. These systems are built for fast, clean responses. Long pauses often break the flow and send your call to a human queue.
- **The Unintelligible Bypass:** Stuck in a loop? Act like your phone connection is terrible. Say garbled words or nonsense. After the system says, "I'm having trouble understanding you" three times, many bots automatically transfer you to a live agent.
- **The Language Barrier Trick:** If the company offers multiple languages, choose one that's not your primary language or does not match your accent. The AI often gives up quickly and routes you to a human trained to handle language issues.

Use these tricks anytime you need real help. You are calling for service, not an AI bot.