



WHEELHOUSE

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Count the Clicks

Auditing the path from
"interested" to "enrolled"



By **Matt Rogers**, Managing Partner, Wheelhouse

Executive summary

A lot of the families you lose in youth enrichment are lost after the parent has already decided to sign up. She found your program, liked what she saw, and tapped the button. What happens next, inside the registration path, decides whether she ends up as a student or as a lead someone has to chase. In most businesses, nobody really owns that path from start to finish. Marketing owns the click, operations owns the classroom, and a software vendor owns everything in between.

Online retailers figured this out a long time ago. The Baymard Institute, which has been testing checkout usability at scale for over a decade, puts the average online cart abandonment rate at about 70%. It also estimates that a typical large retailer can lift conversion by about 35% through checkout design alone. Youth enrichment booking paths get a tiny fraction of that attention, even though our customers are parents booking on their phones, usually after hours, for a kid whose interest is fading by the day.

To see what parents are really up against, we walked the mobile booking path at ten national youth enrichment brands in October 2026. We started where a parent's "near me" search lands, on a local location page. Eight of the ten covered part of the page with at least one overlay before we could do anything. Half ended the path with a request form or a call-back. At least five handed the parent off to a separate booking system on a different domain. And only one showed real open appointment times and let a parent hold one in three taps.

We've seen the same thing from the other side in the businesses we run. A booking form that about 80% of parents started and never finished. A "Book a Trial" flow that asked parents to enter the same information twice. Event links that dropped families on a login page. The question owners kept asking us: *why can't families just register on the website?*

In this paper we'll walk through where all that friction comes from and give you a simple way to measure it: count the taps, fields, decisions, seconds, and handoffs between "interested" and "enrolled." We'll also lay out the order we'd fix things in, plus what franchisors should put in their platform contracts so the path stays fixed.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUPPORTS

- 1 Parents book youth activities on phones and outside business hours. Across 7.2 million camp and activity bookings processed by one registration platform in 2022, about 60% were made on a phone or tablet and about 42% outside the working day.
- 2 Every extra step, field, and system costs completions. In checkout research, 18% of shoppers who abandon cite being forced to create an account, and 17% cite a process that was too long or complicated.
- 3 Asking a parent to choose before they understand (an instructor, a level, a program type) is the friction most specific to this category, and it's the easiest to remove.
- 4 The fixes are usually cheap. Most of them are deletions.

01

Nobody owns the path

Ask a youth enrichment owner who is responsible for their website and they'll name the marketing person or the agency. Ask who is responsible for the booking software and they'll name the vendor. Ask who is responsible for the parent's experience between tapping "Book a Free Trial" and showing up for class, and the answer is usually a pause.

That gap is where enrollments disappear. Marketing measures leads, and by that measure a parent who starts a form and abandons it may never be counted at all. Operations measures attendance, so a family that never makes it to class doesn't show up in their numbers either. The software vendor measures uptime. So everybody's dashboard looks fine while a big chunk of interested parents quietly drop out.

The owners in the art system we work with spotted this before the data did. During a franchisee advisory meeting this summer, one owner put it plainly: being asked to enter the same information twice was irritating before the booking had even started. Another suspected that leads were running at almost exactly double trials because parents filled out the first form, saw a confirmation page, and assumed they were done. They weren't. The

booking continued on a second system that asked for the same details again, and many parents never got there.

In a single-location music school we operate, the old trial booking form had the same problem in a different shape. About 80% of parents who started it didn't finish. The form lived on the scheduling vendor's platform, showed the whole calendar even when no times were open, wasn't built for a phone, and asked the parent to pick an instructor before they could see a time. The school had, in the owner's words, "literally zero control over" it.

When a business stitches together a website, a booking engine, a payment processor, and a CRM, and nobody walks the whole path on a phone the way a parent does, this is what happens by default.

02

Parents book on phones, in stolen minutes

The parent on the other end of your booking path is busy, on her phone, and usually booking at a time when nobody at the studio is around to help.

97%

of US adults ages 30 to 49 own a smartphone (Pew, 2026)

~60%

of 7.2 million youth camp and activity bookings made on a phone or tablet

~42%

of those bookings made outside the working day

- **Phones are the default.** Pew's 2026 Mobile Fact Sheet finds that 97% of US adults ages 30 to 49 own a smartphone, and 16% of all adults use a smartphone but have no home broadband. Contentsquare's 2026 benchmark of 99 billion sessions across 6,500 websites found about 70% of visits come from mobile devices. In the art system we work with, about 70% of website traffic is mobile.

- **Booking happens after hours.** Sawyer, a youth activity registration platform, reported that about 42% of the 7.2 million camp and activity bookings it processed in 2022 were made outside the working day, and about 60% were made on a phone or tablet. Its 2021 data showed the same pattern (vendor data, but the largest youth-specific dataset we found).
- **Parents expect to do it themselves.** In a 2022 survey of 300 camp parents run by a camp registration software company, 87% preferred to sign up online, about 40% ranked ease of registration among their top three reasons for choosing a camp, and more than half had been forced to register in person, on paper, or by phone. (A small vendor survey, so read it as directional.)
- **They're doing it between other things.** Pew's 2026 survey of working parents found that 70% of full-time working parents handle parenting tasks while at work.

Put all that together and the typical booking moment looks something like this: a parent on her phone at 9:40 PM, or in a parking lot between pickups, with a few minutes and a child who mentioned the program at dinner. Every extra tap, field, and decision competes with everything else on her list. When the path asks her to call during business hours or wait for someone to get back to her, the decision usually waits too.

03

What retail already learned

Ecommerce has spent fifteen years studying this exact problem, and most of what they've learned applies straight to registration.

Finding	Source
The average documented online cart abandonment rate is 70.22%, across 50 studies	Baymard Institute, updated Sep 2025
Leaving aside shoppers who were just browsing, 18% abandoned because the site wanted them to create an account, and 17% because checkout was too long or complicated	Baymard Institute, 2025
24% of US shoppers abandoned a cart in the past quarter solely because of forced account creation	Baymard Institute, 2022 survey of 4,384 adults
40% abandon because extra costs were too high, and 12% because they couldn't see the total cost up front	Baymard Institute, 2025
The average checkout asks for 11.3 form fields; most sites need about 8	Baymard Institute, 2024
Better checkout design alone can lift conversion about 35% for a typical large retailer	Baymard Institute
Applying basic form-usability guidelines raised first-try form completion from about 30% to about 73%	Seckler et al., CHI 2014 (Google and University of Basel)
A 0.1-second improvement in mobile site speed was associated with an 8.4% lift in retail conversions and a 21.6% lift in lead-form progression	Google, 55, and Deloitte, "Milliseconds Make Millions," 2020

Three lessons carry over almost word for word.

Accounts belong after the booking. Retail learned to put guest checkout front and center, yet Baymard's 2025 benchmark still found 62% of leading sites failing to make it the most prominent option. Many youth booking platforms ask a parent to create an account, set a password, and add a child profile before she can see a single class time. Nielsen Norman Group's usability research describes login walls as carrying a significant interaction cost, and recommends letting people act first and create an account afterward.

Every field has to earn its place. The CHI study is probably the most useful one here. It changed no products and no prices, only how the forms were laid out and labeled, and first-

try success more than doubled. One heads-up from people who do this for a living: cutting the wrong field can backfire. What you're really trying to remove is effort and doubt, and sometimes that means rewording a field and keeping it.

Show the whole price early. Registration fees, materials fees, and processing fees that appear only at the end create the same surprise that drives 40% of retail abandonment. The FTC's 2025 all-in pricing rule applies to live events and short-term lodging, not youth programs, but it's a pretty clear sign of where customer expectations are going.

04

The Front Door Audit: ten brands on a phone

In October 2026 we walked the booking path at ten national youth enrichment brands across art, music, STEM, swim, gymnastics, sports, and tutoring. We used a phone-sized browser and started where a local search lands, on a location page, then followed the most prominent path toward a trial, an assessment, or a first class. We counted taps, recorded every form, noted each handoff to another system, and stopped before submitting anything. We've kept the brands anonymous because we care about the pattern, and we're not here to call anyone out.

Brand category	Where the path ends	Taps to the first commit point	Required fields at the first form	Systems crossed
Gymnastics and early childhood	Pick a live class time	3, then re-pick on a separate store	Not reached (store blocked our browser)	3
Child development and athletics	Contact form before any schedule	1	4, plus a dropdown, two pre-checked consents, and a CAPTCHA	1
Swim (brand A)	Request form, or a portal wizard	1 to the form; 5+ in the portal	4, plus a CAPTCHA	2
Music (brand A)	Request a demo	Scroll about two screens	5	1
Tutoring (brand A)	Pick a real appointment time	3	5	2
Swim (brand B)	Placement quiz before any booking	1, then roughly 6 to 12 quiz screens	Not reached	1
STEM	Event registration with an account	2 or more	Not reached	2 to 3
Sports (preschool)	Catalog of 512 listings with filters	1, then 3 to 5 filters	Not reached	2
Tutoring (brand B)	Call-back request	1	2	1

Brand category	Where the path ends	Taps to the first commit point	Required fields at the first form	Systems crossed
Music (brand B)	Choose a lesson type to see times and prices	2 or more	Not reached	1 to 2

8 of 10 overlay on arrival	5 of 10 ended in "we'll be in touch"	5+ of 10 handed off to another domain	2 of 10 showed clear prices
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1 of 10 clean self-booked time
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Front Door Audit, October 23, 2026. Ten national brands, mobile browser, starting from a local location page.

What we found

- 1. Most front doors had something in the way.** Eight of ten showed at least one overlay before we could act: a cookie or privacy banner, a promotional pop-up, a chat bubble, or a lead-capture form. At least three stacked two or more. One swim brand opened with a full-screen promotion, and its "Text us" chat bubble sat on top of the lower half of its own enrollment form.
- 2. Half ended with "we'll be in touch."** Five of ten ended the parent's online path with a request form, a demo request, or a call-back, so the family's next step depended on how fast someone called back. Our companion paper, *The Same-Day Rule*, covers what that delay costs.
- 3. Only one offered a clean self-booked appointment.** A tutoring brand showed real open times by day ("4+ slots available"), let us pick one in three taps, and asked for five required fields, with an optional second child. It was the best path in the sample.

- 4. Handoffs were the norm.** At least five of ten sent the parent to a separate booking system on a different web address, and each handoff changed the design, the navigation, and often the rules. In one case, a "Book Free Intro" button opened a new tab on a separate store at a date-level page, so the parent had to pick the class again. In another, choosing "Yes, help me find the right class" in the booking portal sent the parent back to the marketing site, where the same promotional pop-up appeared again.
- 5. Local pages sent parents back to national pages.** Two of ten pointed a parent who was already on the local page toward a national "Find a Location" search. In one, the local page's "Register" buttons all led there.
- 6. Prices were mostly hidden.** Only two of ten showed clear prices on the local page; one more showed them after the parent chose a lesson type, and one disclosed only an annual fee.
- 7. The calendar moved on and the website didn't.** On October 23, three of ten still showed out-of-date seasonal messaging: a "now enrolling for fall" banner linking to an August event, back-to-school artwork on a scheduling page, and a Labor Day closure notice on a booking portal's home screen.
- 8. Only two forms were built for siblings.** Two of ten let a parent add a second child on the first form. Census data suggests about 57% of family households with children have two or more.

One brand deserves a shout-out. A tutoring brand's "Schedule a Call" button opened a two-field form: a mobile number and a preferred call-back window. It's still a request form, but it's the most respectful one we saw, because it only asks for what the business needs to take the next step.

05

Five friction points unique to youth enrichment

Retail's lessons cover forms, accounts, and prices. Youth enrichment has a few problems all its own, and we run into them on almost every path we walk.

Choose before you understand

A parent new to an activity is asked to pick an instructor, a skill level, a program track, or a lesson format before she knows what any of them mean. The music school we operate made leads choose an instructor before showing a time, and parents often clicked through to find no availability at all. In our audit, a swim brand mapped children to more than a dozen named levels, a sports brand presented 512 listings behind a set of filters with instructions on which filter to use, and a music brand asked parents to choose among seven lesson types to see times and prices.

The research on choice is a little more complicated than the famous jam study makes it sound. A 2010 meta-analysis of 50 experiments found that, on average, more options didn't hurt. But a larger 2015 meta-analysis by Chernev, Böckenholt, and Goodman found that choice overload is reliable under specific conditions: when the choice is complex, when the task is hard, and when the person is unsure what they want. That's a first-time parent choosing a level for a six-year-old. Families who've done this before can handle a big menu just fine, and new families need you to recommend something.

The fix: make the first choice for the parent. Ask the child's age and one or two simple questions, then recommend a class. One swim brand in our audit does this with a placement quiz, which is the right idea, though at six to twelve screens it could be much shorter.

Ask twice

Asking for the same info twice is the classic sign of a stitched-together tech stack. In the art system, parents entered their details on the website, landed on a "What happens next?" page, and then had to enter them again in the booking platform and pick their child's program a second time. The leadership team identified that second step as the point where they were losing the most families, and owners suspected it explained why leads ran at roughly double trials. A related bug sent families who clicked an event link to the booking platform's login page instead of the event.

The fix: one form, one time. Whatever the parent types first should carry through to the booking, and the link should land on the specific class she chose.

The widget and the dead end

Many youth brands embed a third-party booking widget in their site or send parents to a vendor-hosted page. That's often the practical choice, but every handoff changes the look, the navigation, and the rules, and it's where the odd failures live: the store that opens in a new tab at the wrong page, the portal that loops back to the marketing site, the party page that showed a login screen on iPhones but not on Android. That last one cost a studio in the art system more than bookings. The ad agency declined to run its birthday-party ads until the page was fixed. Google's own guidance on embedded content is to put important content directly on the page rather than relying on an iframe, which matters for being found as well as for booking.

The fix: keep the parent on your page for as long as possible, and test the full handoff on an iPhone and an Android phone every time either system changes.

Nothing to book

Sometimes the path works fine and there's just nothing on it to book. Sessions that aren't live yet, a calendar that shows every slot including the full ones, a weekly class that isn't listed because only holiday workshops are, or no drop-in option for the family that isn't ready to commit. In the art system, more than 80% of summer camp bookings came after May 1 and drop-ins made up about 46% of the bookings after that date, which means a missing drop-in option or a late session launch removes a large share of demand from the shelf. Parents in that 2022 camp survey said the same thing in their own words: 84% wanted to be notified automatically when a waitlist spot opened.

The fix: keep the shelf stocked. Publish sessions well before demand peaks, hide or mark full classes, offer a waitlist with automatic notification, and give undecided families a single-session or drop-in option.

One child at a time

Most booking flows are built for one kid at a time, and yet your most valuable customers are families with two or three. Census data shows about 57% of family households with children have two or more, and a TeamSnap and Aspen Institute survey found that about 30% of youth-sports households have more than one child playing. In our audit, only two of ten first

forms let a parent add a second child. Every other path meant repeating the process, often with no way to see whether the two children's classes could be back to back.

The fix: a form that asks "How many children are you registering?" and a schedule view that shows sibling-friendly time slots side by side.

06

How to count your own clicks

The audit we ran on ten brands takes about twenty minutes per location, and we'd encourage every owner to run it on their own business at least once a season. Do it on your phone, on cellular data, logged out, ideally in the evening when parents actually book.

Step 1: Start where parents start

Search your category and town ("kids art classes near me") and tap your own listing, or open your location page from Google Maps. Don't start from your homepage unless that's where your traffic lands.

Step 2: Follow the most obvious path

Tap whatever a first-time parent would tap: the biggest button, the one that says "Free Trial" or "Book." Don't use what you know about your own site.

Step 3: Count five things on the way to a booked class

What to count	What it tells you	Target
Taps	How much effort the path takes	3 or fewer to see real times; 6 or fewer to a booked trial
Fields typed	How much you're asking up front	5 or fewer before the parent sees a time
Decisions	How many choices a new parent has to make without help	1 or 2, with a recommendation
Seconds	How long the whole path takes on a phone	Under 2 minutes
Handoffs	How many times the parent changes systems or domains	0 or 1, with matching design

Step 4: Note everything that gets in the way

Overlays, pop-ups, chat bubbles covering buttons, outdated banners, a login wall, a price that appears only at the end, a calendar full of unavailable times, a dead link.

Step 5: Pull drop-off by step

If your analytics can show how many people start the trial form and how many finish, look at it. If they can't, that's the first finding. The music school we operate couldn't attribute anything but its social-media leads for several weeks because tracking on the vendor's form had broken, and nobody owned fixing it.

Step 6: Give every step an owner

Write down who is responsible for each screen: the website, the form, the booking engine, the confirmation message, the reminder. Any step without a name is a step nobody is watching.

The fix order

Once you've counted, here's the order we'd fix things in. It goes from cheapest to most expensive, and most owners find the first two steps take care of most of the problem.

- 1. Remove it.** Start by cutting things. Pop-ups on the location page, fields you don't need until the first day of class, a second form that repeats the first, outdated banners, and any step that exists because the software defaulted to it. The CHI form study more than doubled first-try completion without changing anything about the product.
- 2. Defer it.** If you need the information eventually, ask for it after the booking. Emergency contacts, medical notes, how-did-you-hear, a password, the child's T-shirt size. A parent who has already booked a trial will happily answer a few more questions, and one who hasn't will often leave.
- 3. Decide it for them.** Replace open-ended choices with a recommendation. Ask the child's age, suggest the right class, and let experienced families override it.
- 4. Prefill it.** Anything the parent has told you once should never be asked again, whether that's in the next form, the booking platform, or the confirmation text.
- 5. Merge it.** Where a path crosses two systems, fix the connection so the parent lands on the exact class she picked, with her details already filled in. Then test it on an iPhone and an Android phone.
- 6. Own the page.** If a vendor's widget or hosted page is the weak point, bring the booking onto your own site, or choose a platform that lets you control it.

The art system we work with has spent this fall working down this list. It is routing the post-trial step straight to the specific class instead of a generic program page, simplifying its class and membership pages for mobile, and moving to let families buy a membership directly on the website, which owners had been asking for. That last change came after an owner told the leadership team she couldn't count how many parents had asked why they couldn't just register on the website. The answer from leadership was that they'd listened to franchisees and changed their minds.

The music school went a different way, and it's worth a look. Instead of fighting a self-booking flow it couldn't control, it began testing a simpler path: a short form, an automatic text asking the family's preferred day and time, and a reply from staff with a specific open slot. That trades a little speed for a lot less friction, and it pairs naturally with the fast, personal follow-up described in *The Same-Day Rule*.

For franchisors: write it into the contract

In a franchise system, the booking path is usually chosen once by the franchisor and lived with by every franchisee. That makes it one of the biggest decisions a franchisor makes, and one of the least looked at. The platform contract is where the path gets protected or neglected.

- 1. Spell out the parent's path along with the features.** Every platform demo shows off features. Ask the vendor to book a trial on a phone in front of you, and count the taps, fields, decisions, seconds, and handoffs. Put the maximums in the statement of work.
- 2. Require step-level reporting.** The platform should report, by location, how many parents started each step and how many finished it. If it can't, you can't manage the path, and neither can your franchisees.
- 3. Require guest booking and post-booking accounts.** A parent should be able to book a trial without creating a password. Accounts can come after.
- 4. Require deep links.** Every class, event, and session should have a stable link that lands the parent on that exact item, so marketing, texts, and Google Business Profile posts can send families straight to it.
- 5. Test on real phones before every release.** Both iPhone and Android, logged out, on cellular data. Make the vendor responsible for regressions.
- 6. Give franchisees a path to report friction, and track it.** In our experience, the issues a platform vendor has logged and the issues franchisees are actually living with can look very different. A shared, categorized issue log with response-time commitments keeps everyone honest.
- 7. Run the audit quarterly.** Pick a few locations each quarter, walk the path, and publish the results to the system. The franchisees with the best numbers will tell you what to fix next.

For owners, the path decides how many interested families become enrolled ones. For franchisors, it's also part of the promise made to every franchisee: that the system's tools help them win families. When nobody owns the path, that promise breaks quietly, one abandoned form at a time.

About this research

We pulled from three kinds of evidence for this paper. **Published research**, listed in the sources below, which we read in the original or in a reliable reproduction and describe in our own words; where a source is vendor research, we say so. **Operating data and observations** from two youth enrichment businesses the Wheelhouse partners operate, a national art education franchise system with more than 30 studios and a single-location music school in Texas, drawn from their trackers, owner meetings, and website reviews between August and October 2026. Both are anonymized. **The Front Door Audit**, in which we walked the mobile booking path at ten national youth enrichment brands on October 23, 2026, starting from local location pages in a 375-pixel-wide mobile browser. We dismissed cookie banners with the most privacy-protective option, did not count those taps, never entered personal data, and never submitted a form. Brands are anonymized, and a few paths couldn't be followed to the end because a site blocked our browser or required personal information to continue; we've noted those as "not reached." One additional brand was excluded because its locator returned no results on mobile.

An audit of ten brands on one day is a snapshot, so take it as one. Websites change often, and some of what we found may already be fixed. The patterns, though, were consistent across categories and match what we see in our own systems.

Next step

Get your Click Count

Wheelhouse will run the Count the Clicks audit on your trial booking path and send back a one-page scorecard: taps, fields, decisions, seconds, and handoffs, with the three changes we'd make first. For franchisors, we'll audit a sample of locations and show you where the path varies across your system.

choosewheelhouse.com



About the author

Matt Rogers is a Managing Partner at Wheelhouse, a franchise consultancy that works exclusively with youth enrichment brands. He leads marketing for brands the Wheelhouse partners own and operate, and previously held marketing roles at BYJU'S, Anheuser-Busch, and Code Ninjas. Wheelhouse's partners have built and run the systems their clients benchmark against, across art, coding, music, tutoring, and sports.

Companion paper: *The Same-Day Rule: Why Enrollment Is Won or Lost Before the Family Leaves the Building*

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