The Construction Communication Gap

Why it's time to rethink mobile calls as operational assets, not risks.

A practical guide for construction directors, commercial managers, and safety leaders.

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Executive summary

Construction runs on conversations. But disputes run on evidence.

Every day, critical decisions are made on mobile calls between site managers and subcontractors, project managers and suppliers, supervisors and engineers. These conversations often change scope, sequence work, confirm safety controls, or unlock progress.

But when something goes wrong, those same conversations are rarely visible, searchable, or provable.

Industry research shows that poor communication is a contributing factor in a significant proportion of UK construction disputes, alongside inadequate contract administration and unclear responsibilities. When disputes escalate, the question is no longer 'what do you remember saying?', it becomes 'what evidence do you have?'

This guide is not about technology first. It's about risk, disputes, and how verbal instructions are managed in modern construction.

In this guide, you'll learn:

- **Why construction disputes start with conversations**
- **The UK dispute picture (and where communication fits)**
- **The calls that create risk**
- **What investigators and adjudicators ask later**
- **What "good" looks like in managing verbal instructions**

Only after that do we look at tools including Mobile+ as an example of best practice, not a silver bullet.

Note: Nothing in this guide suggests replacing formal contract administration; the focus is on improving the quality and availability of contemporaneous records that support it.

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Why construction disputes start with conversations

Most construction disputes don't start with bad intent. They start with informal decisions made under pressure. In practice, these conversations rarely determine entitlement on their own, but they often shape how later evidence is interpreted.

A quick call to:

• Agree a variation "to keep things moving"
• Resequence work around access issues
• Confirm a safety control before works resume
• Resolve a delay without formal notice

At the time, these calls feel practical and necessary.

Later, they become contested.

UK adjudication data shows that disputes are most often rooted in poor administration, unclear responsibility, and weak communication, rather than purely technical issues. Once a dispute crystallises, verbal instructions become some of the hardest decisions to evidence.

This creates a dangerous gap:

• Decisions are made verbally
• Records are fragmented or missing
• Evidence is reconstructed after the event

And that gap is where cost, delay, and liability grow.

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The UK dispute picture (and where communication fits)

Construction disputes rarely have one simple cause.

But the UK data is consistent on three things: disputes are common, they disrupt delivery, and they often trace back to how decisions were administered, communicated, and evidenced.

1) Adjudication is busy, and "poor communications" is on the list

In the year ending 31 March 2024, there were 2,264 adjudication referrals — the highest level recorded in the dataset used in the KCL report.

When adjudication professionals were asked about leading causes of disputes (multiple selections), the top responses included:

- **50%** – inadequate contract administration
- **42%** – lack of competence of the contracting parties
- **30%** – exaggerated claims
- **30%** – changes by the client
- **25%** – adversarial culture
- **17%** – poor communications

Why this matters: even where the "headline" cause is administration or competence, the dispute still tends to play out through conversations, instructions, approvals, handovers, and clarifications that are later hard to evidence.

Sources: King's College London, Construction Adjudication in the UK Report 3.0 (2024 update) (Figure 16 + adjudication referrals). RIBA, Construction Contracts and Law Report 2022 (dispute outcomes + impact). Arcadis, 2022 Global Construction Disputes Report (UK dispute value/length).
These figures reflect reported drivers and outcomes of disputes; they do not imply that any single factor operates in isolation.

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The UK dispute picture (and where communication fits)

2) Disputes don't stay on paper — they hit progress on site

In RIBA's 2022 report, people with disputes experience in the last 12 months said:

- **47%** of disputes were ongoing
- **44%** were settled
- **9%** were abandoned
- And in **27%** of projects in dispute, construction work was stopped or suspended.

RIBA also notes disputes most frequently occur between the client and the main contractor (76%) — i.e., the exact relationship where variations, sequencing and access decisions are constantly discussed and agreed under pressure.

3) UK disputes can be large and they can drag on for months

Arcadis' 2022 disputes report puts

Average UK dispute value: **£28.1m**

Highest UK dispute value: **£223m**

Average UK dispute length: just under 12 months

Sources: King's College London, Construction Adjudication in the UK Report 3.0 (2024 update) (Figure 16 + adjudication referrals). RIBA, Construction Contracts and Law Report 2022 (dispute outcomes + impact). Arcadis, 2022 Global Construction Disputes Report (UK dispute value/length). Figures are based on disputes the Arcadis Contract Solutions team handled in 2021, plus expert input. Converted from USD.

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The calls that create risk

These are the calls that later appear in disputes, claims, and investigations:

1. **Variation calls**
"Can you just do it? We'll sort the paperwork later."

2. **Sequencing calls**
"Switch the order so we don't lose the day."

3. **Access & delay calls**
"You can't get in yet — stand down for now."

4. **Safety calls**
"It's fine to proceed if you put extra controls in place."

At the time, these calls solve problems. Afterwards, they raise questions:

• Who authorised it?
• Was cost or time discussed?
• Was safety properly confirmed?
• Did both parties understand the impact?

These questions are typically asked to establish sequence, intent and credibility, rather than to replace formal contractual records.

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What investigators and adjudicators ask later

When issues escalate, the focus shifts fast:

• What exactly was said?
• Who said it?
• When did it happen?
• Was it challenged or accepted?
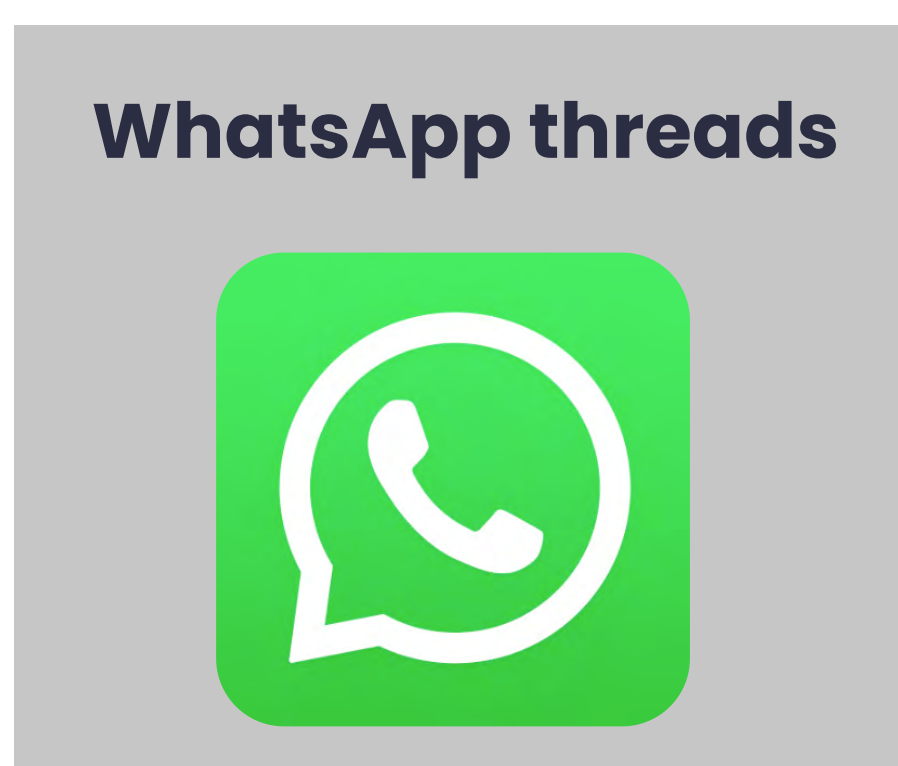• What happened next?

Without a reliable record, businesses rely on:

• Memory
• Call logs
• Conflicting statements

And that's rarely enough.

Why UCaaS, apps, and workarounds aren't the answer

Many firms try to patch the issue with:

WhatsApp threads

Manual call recordings

Desktop-based VoIP systems

Verbal summaries in site diaries
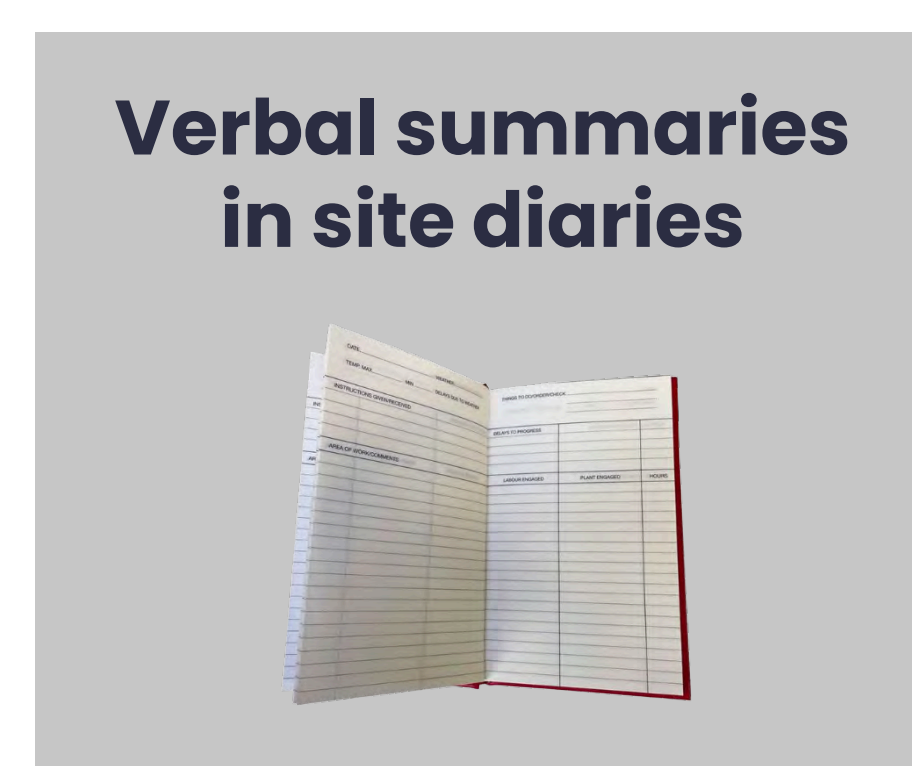
But these fail under pressure:

• Not consistent
• Not automatic
• Not auditable
• Not mobile-native
• Not trusted by legal or insurance

You don't need a communications app.
You need a conversation intelligence layer for your real-world, mobile-first construction operations.

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What "good" looks like in managing verbal instructions

From informal calls to operational records

Managing verbal instructions well doesn't mean stopping conversations. It means treating them as operational assets, not informal side channels.

Best practice in construction has three layers:

1. Capture

Work-related calls are captured consistently, without relying on individuals to remember or press record.
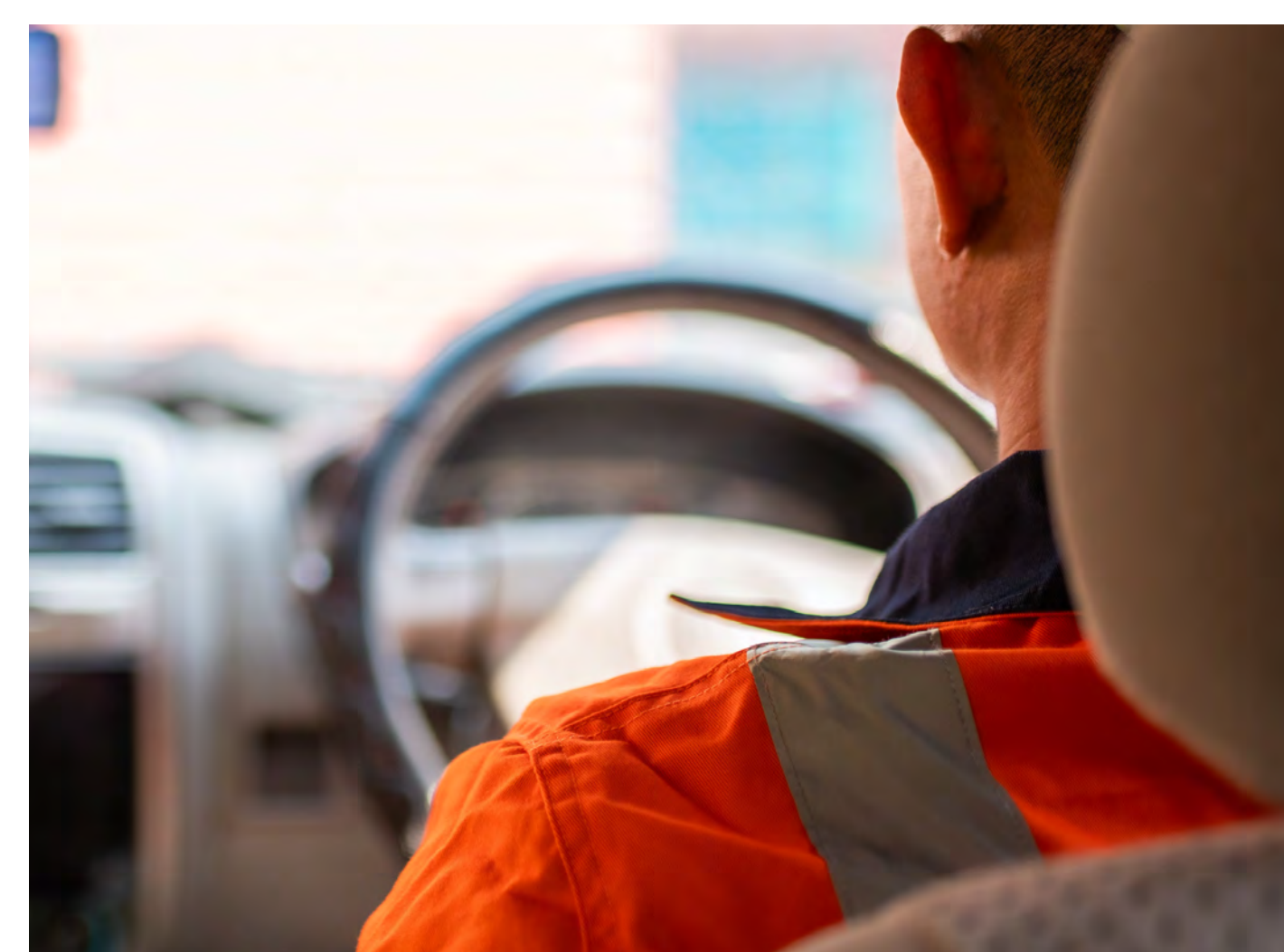
2. Control

Recordings are stored centrally, securely, and access is governed by role, not scattered across devices.

3. Learn

Calls can be searched, reviewed, and analysed to:

- Resolve disputes faster
- Improve consistency of instructions
- Identify recurring risk patterns
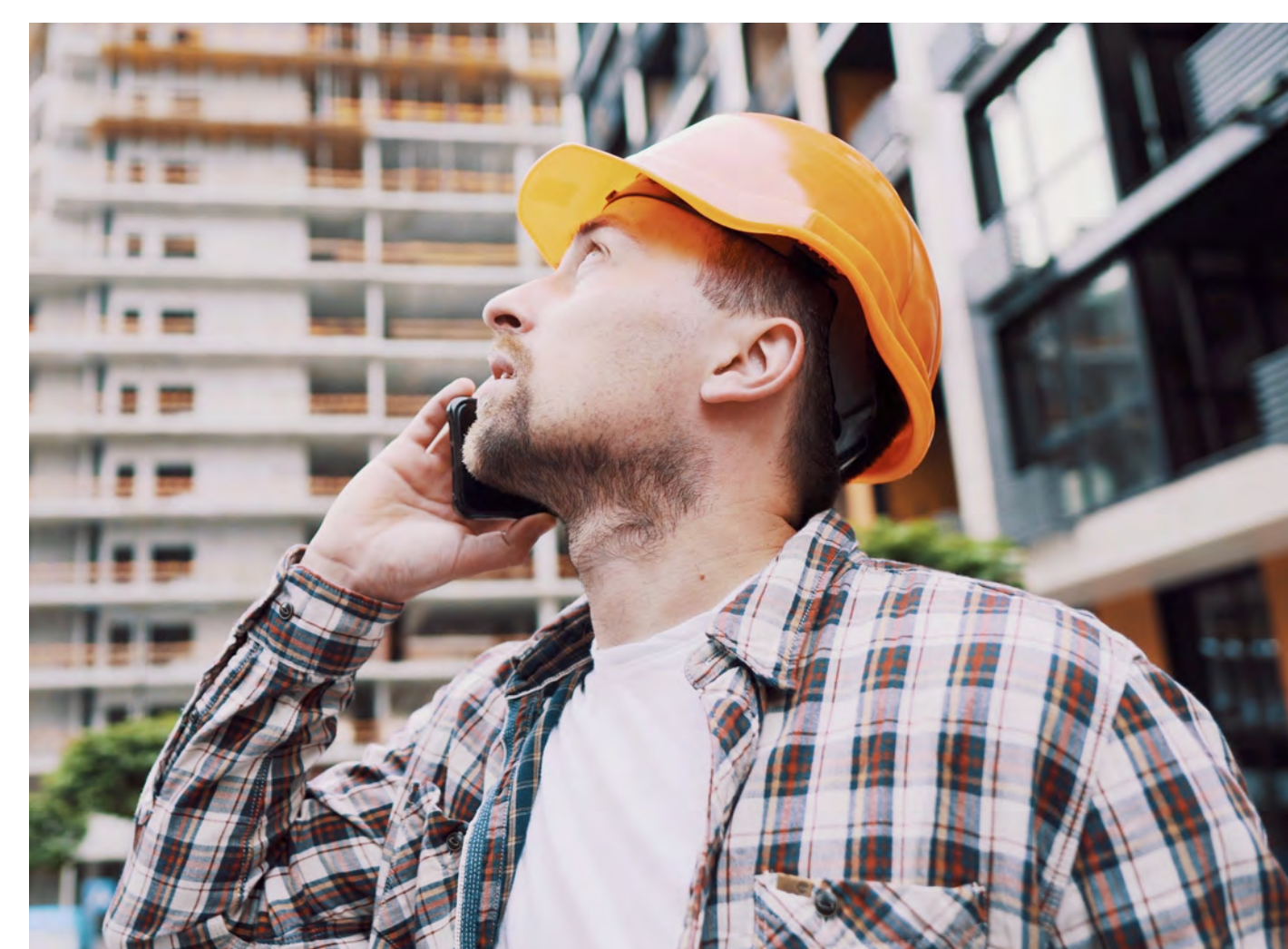
This approach supports good contract administration by improving clarity and traceability; it does not remove the need for formal notices or records. This is about clarity, not surveillance.

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Introducing Mobile+

Mobile+ is PiPcall's complete mobile communication and conversation intelligence solution for the construction industry.

It consists of three integrated components, working together to turn mobile calls into secure, searchable operational records:

- A mobile app for workers, supervisors, and subcontractors
- A central admin portal for commercial, safety, and compliance teams
- Call transcripts and AI insights to support investigations, disputes, and continuous improvement

This is not just call recording. It's conversation intelligence for construction operations.

See how this approach works in a real construction environment.

Tools such as Mobile+ are intended to support commercial and safety processes, not to determine liability or entitlement.

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Mobile+ for site workers and subcontractors

The Mobile+ app is the front line component of the solution.
It runs on any iOS or Android phone and gives each user a separate business line for work calls.
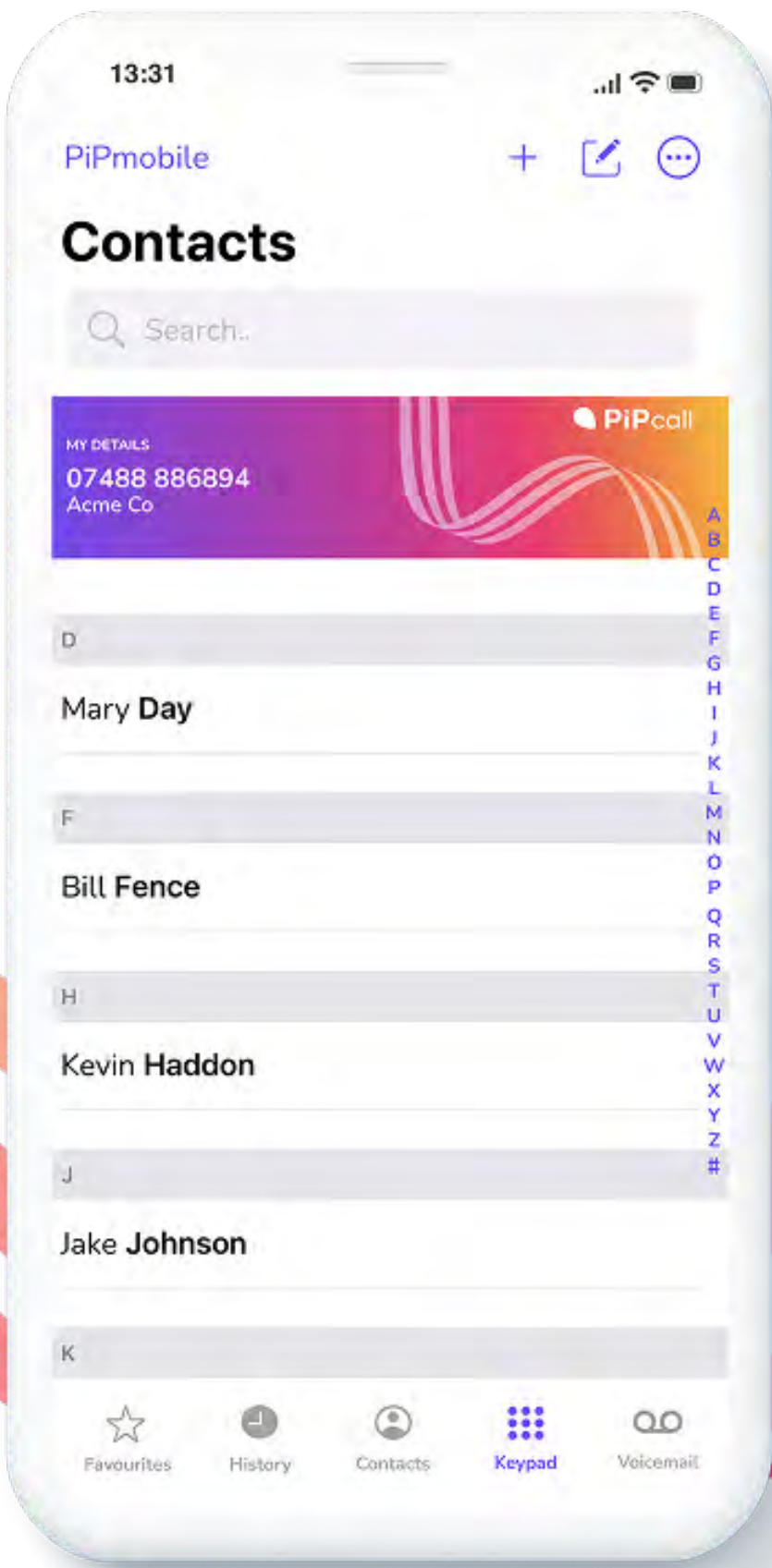
How it works on site
• Calls are made and received over the mobile voice network (not VoIP)
• All calls through the app are recorded automatically. No buttons to press, no user decisions, no training required
• Personal calls remain private and are never recorded
• The app is designed for real construction environments, moving between sites, working offline from offices, and coordinating across subcontractors
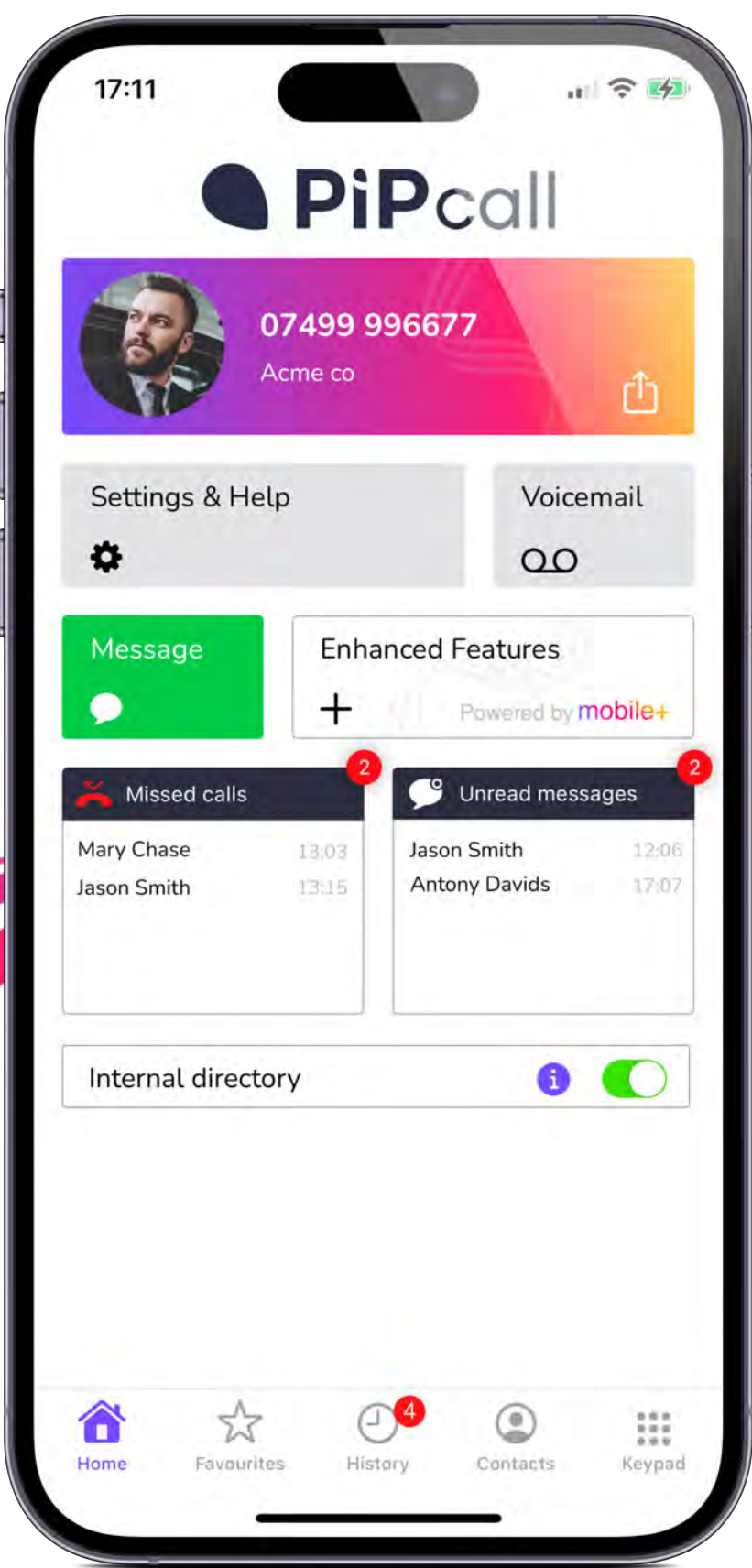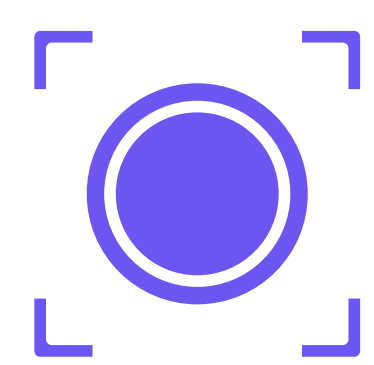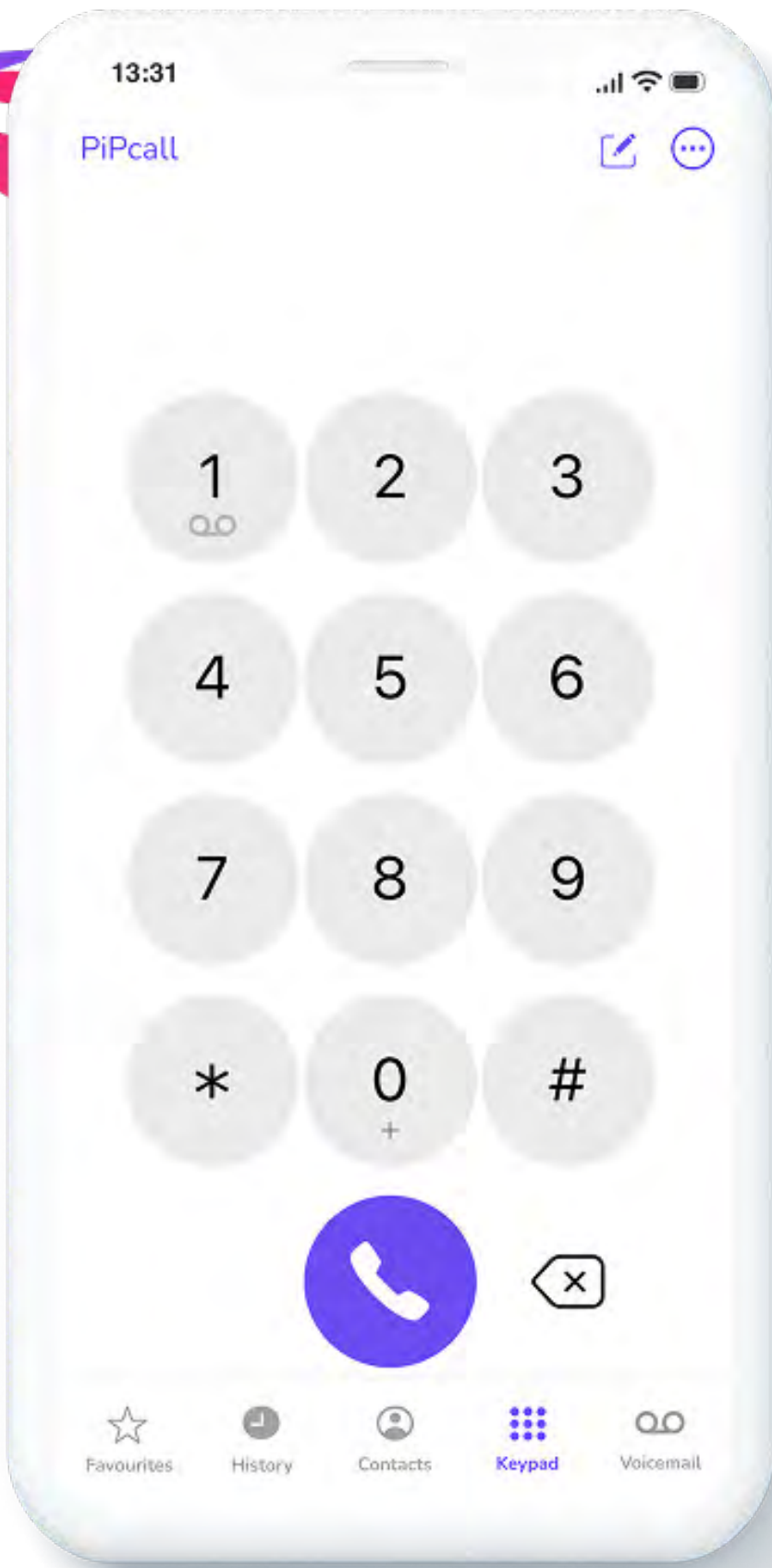
Simple Interface   **Contacts Directory**   **SMS Messaging**   **Dedicated Dial pad**
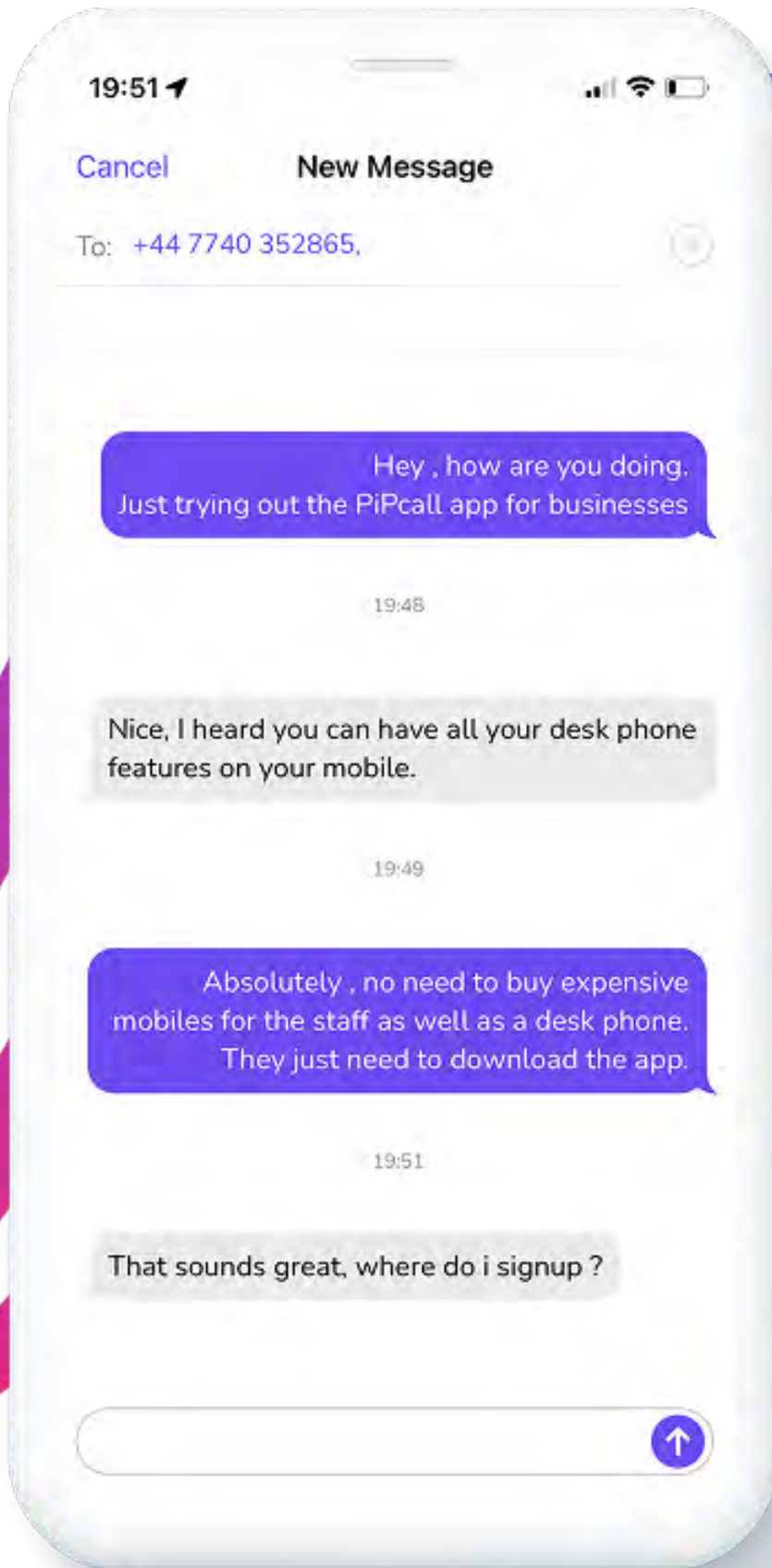
Automatic call recording
Every business call is recorded automatically, protecting workers and ensuring complete evidential traceability.
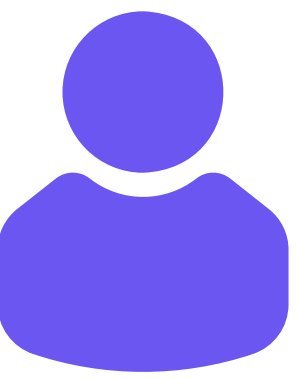
Crystal clear calls
Uniquely, calls are made over the dedicated mobile voice network, not the internet like standard VoIP-based softphone apps.

Call monitoring
Managers can listen, coach, and support staff in real time, improving communication quality and compliance.

BYOD friendly
Works seamlessly on personal or company devices, ensuring contractors and staff stay compliant everywhere.

See this in action with a real construction use case.

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# Mobile+ for project leaders, compliance & commercial teams

In construction, visibility and traceability are essential, especially when managing fast-moving projects with layered subcontractors and mobile teams.

The Mobile+ Portal gives compliance, commercial, and safety managers the tools to stay in control:
• Access all recorded calls securely
• Assign role-based permissions to ensure data access aligns with roles
• Support incident investigations, dispute resolution, and post-incident reviews
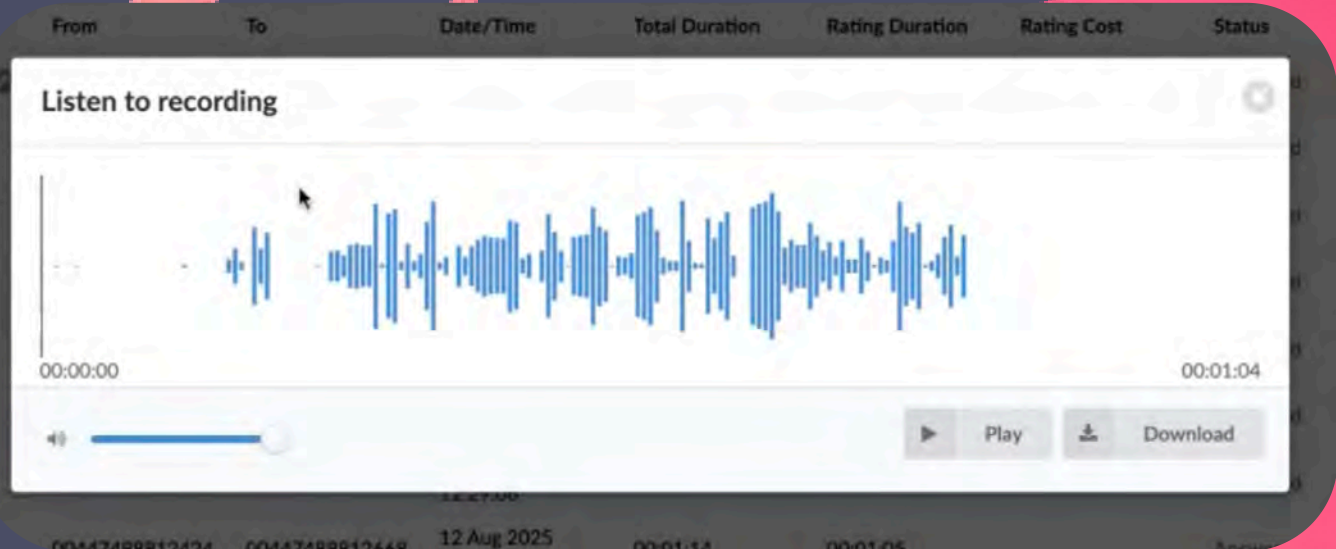• Retain evidence in GDPR-compliant cloud storage with full audit trail
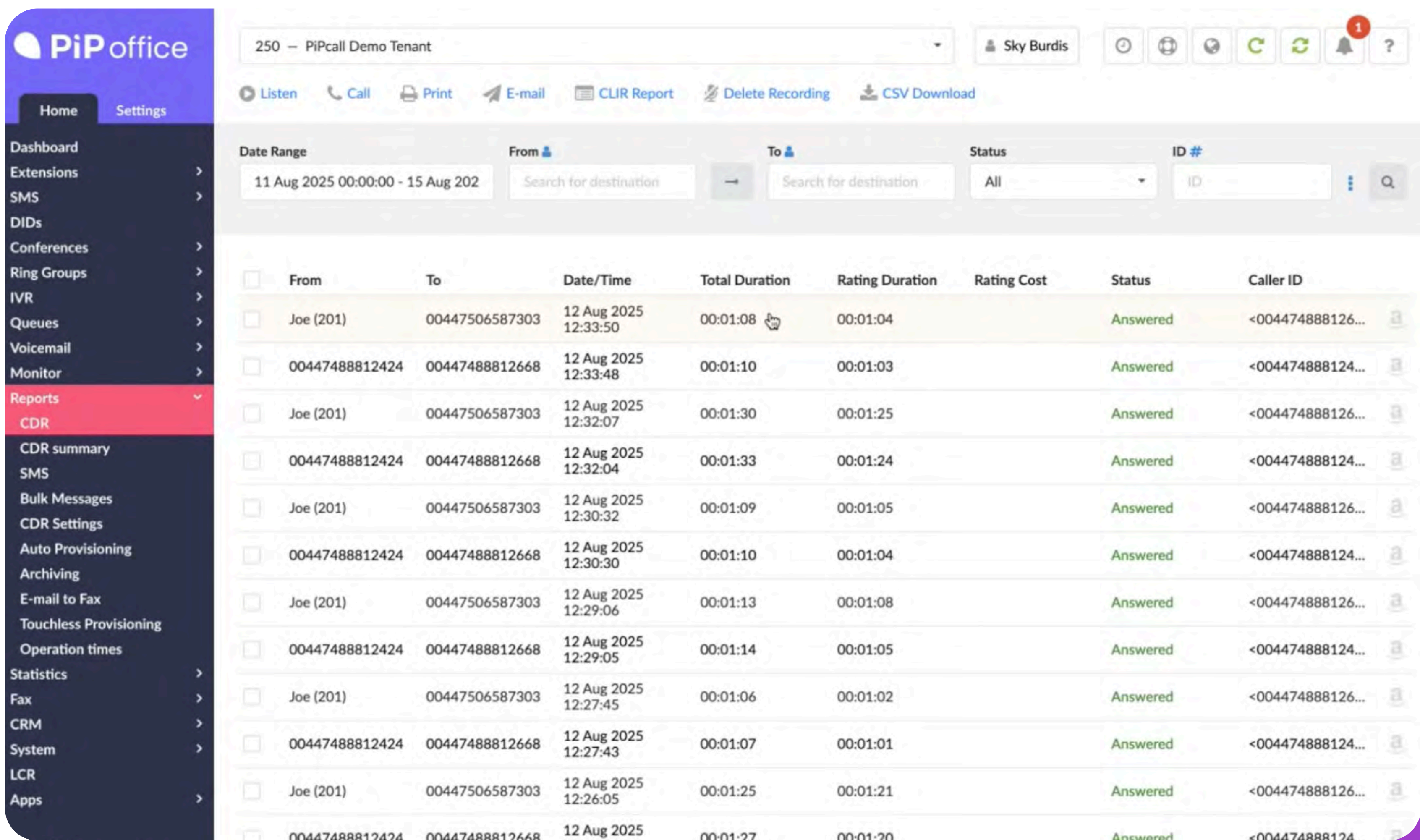
Date range:
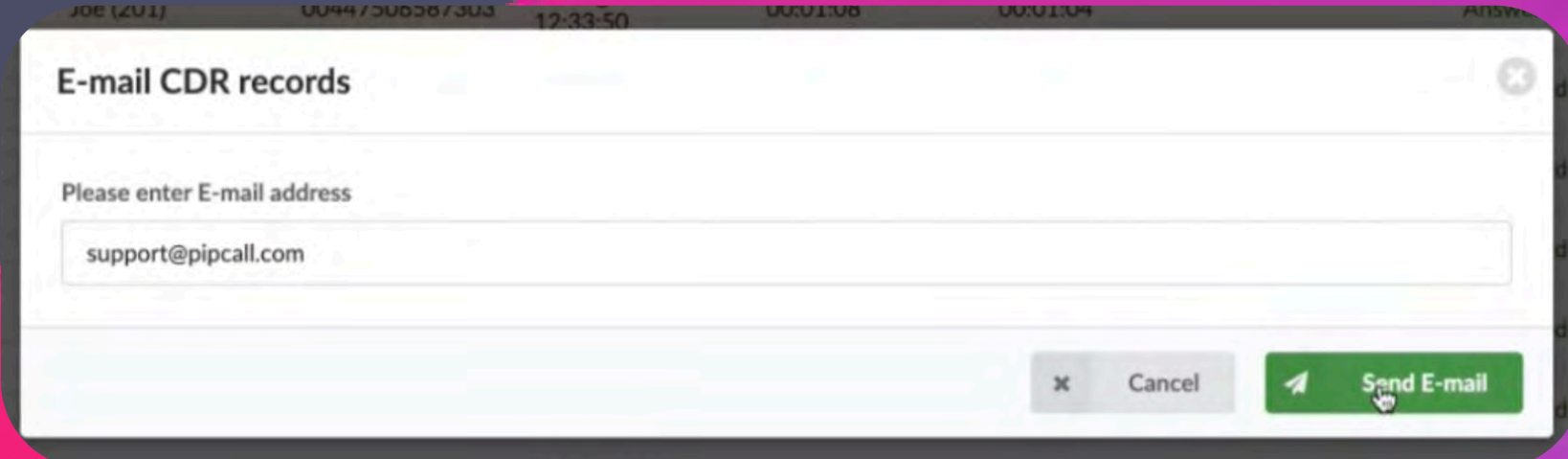Search call recordings by date.
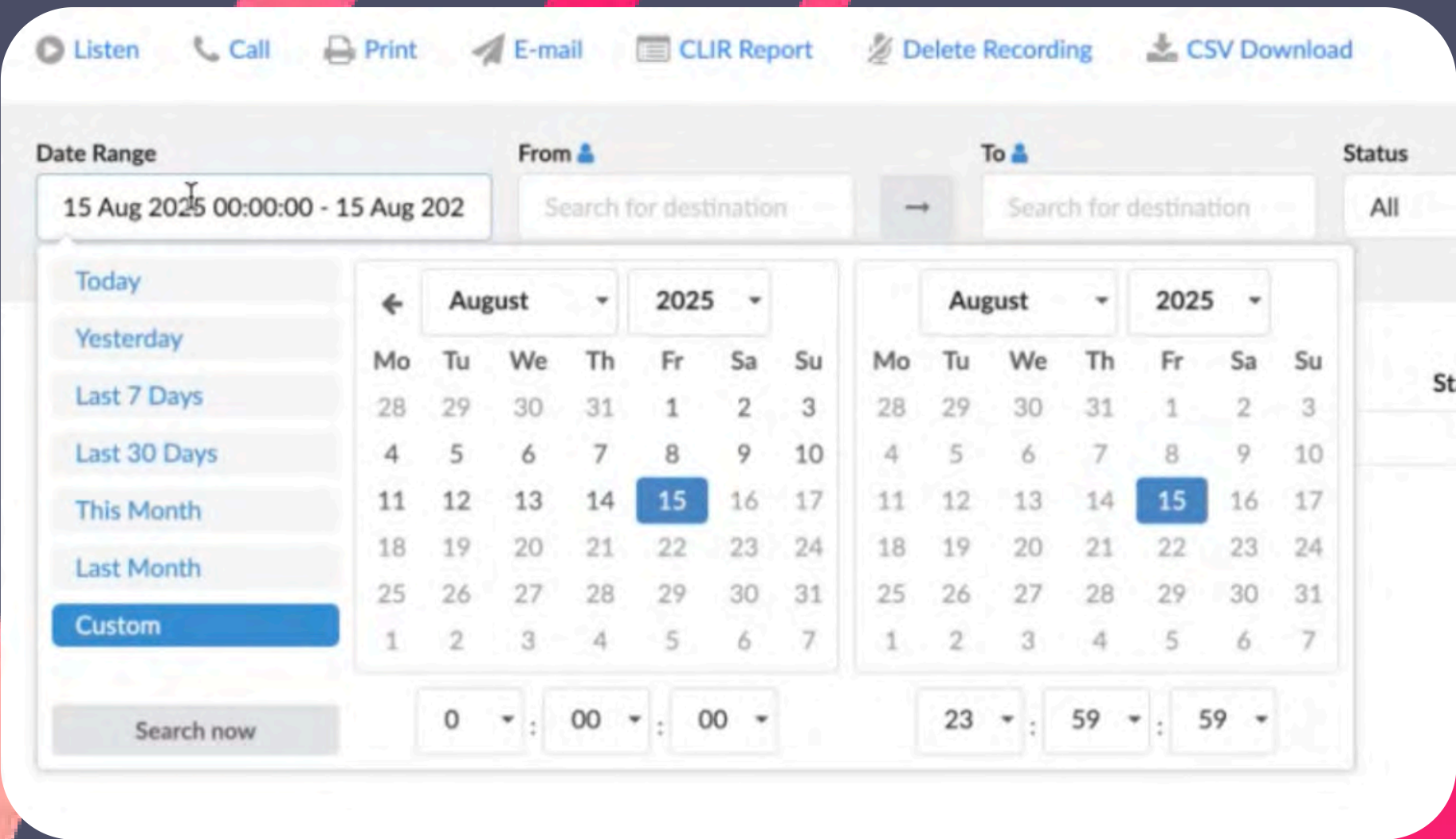
Individuals:
Search call recordings by individual.
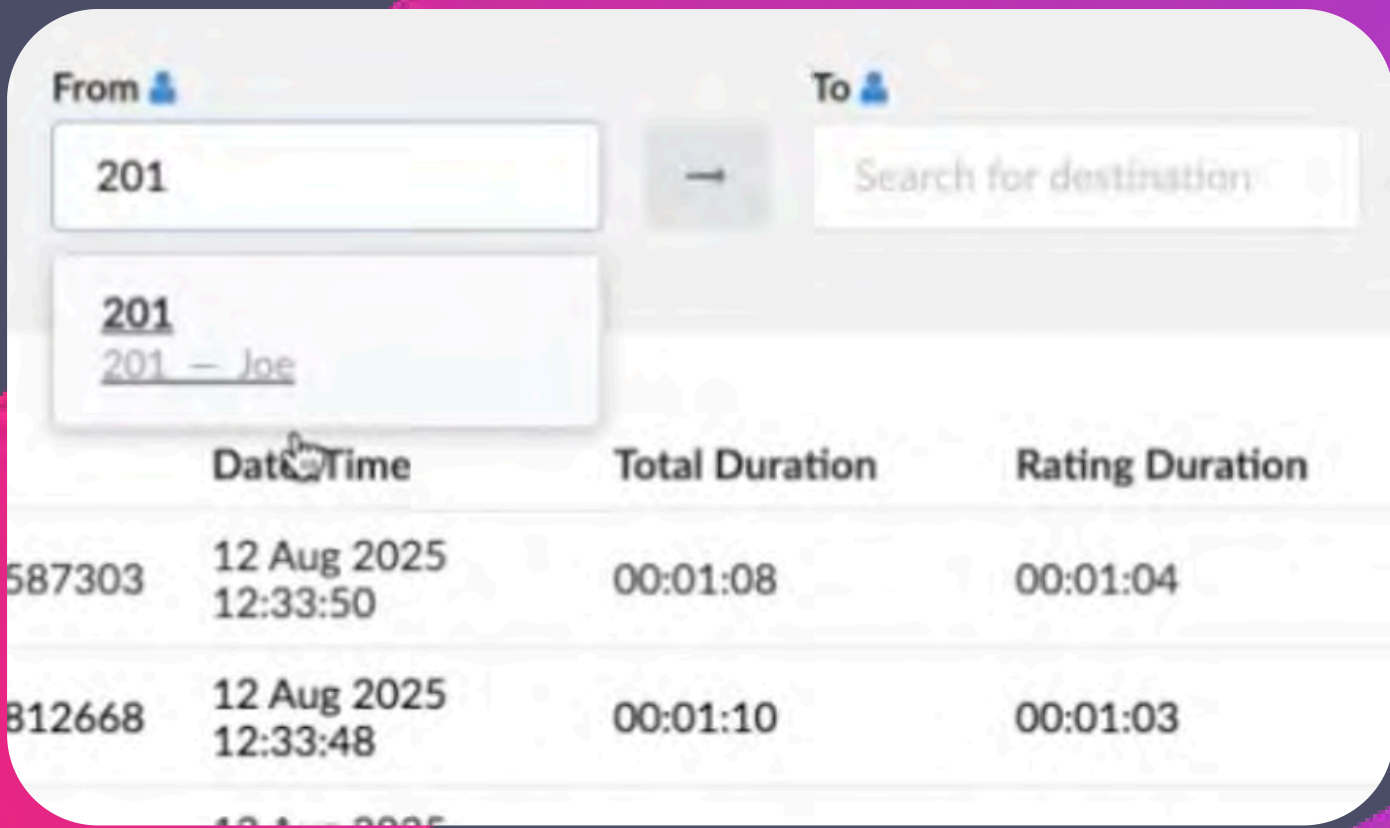
Listen and download:
Click on any recording to listen and download.

Share:
Send the call recording via email straight from the portal.

See this in action with a real construction use case

From recorded to revealed: Unlock insights with AI

Recording calls is just the beginning.

Mobile+ offers AI-powered analysis of mobile conversations, helping construction leaders surface key risks, patterns, and actions from thousands of daily interactions.

With PiPcall's AI layer, you can:
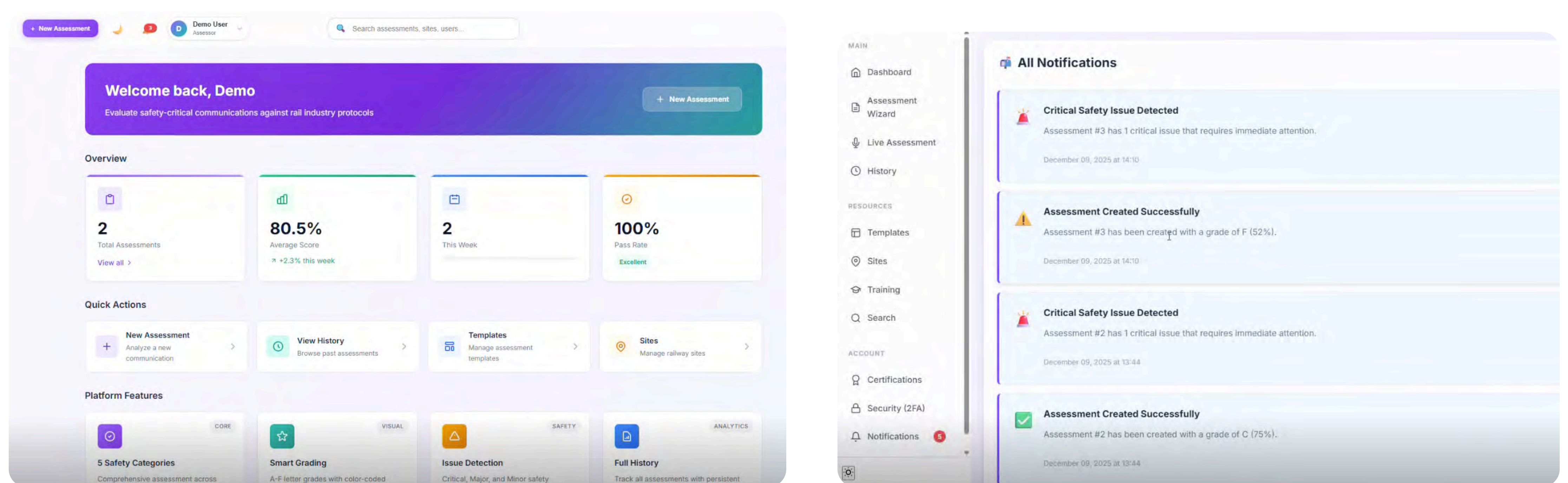
Detect safety language: Automatically flag when safety protocols are confirmed or missing.

Spot escalations and conflicts: Identify frustrated exchanges or disagreement that may need attention.

Coach for better communication: Use anonymised language feedback to support training and improve clarity on site.

Extract project metrics: See how many calls involve variation orders, delays, or access changes.

Support investigations & disputes: Instantly locate calls relevant to incidents or disputes with smart filters.

Assists professional judgement: Transcripts and AI insights are designed to assist review and prioritisation; professional judgement remains essential.

AI helps your leadership team move from reactive defence to proactive risk management, based on real conversations, not assumptions.

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How it works: A real construction scenario

A site manager instructs a subcontractor during a late-day handover. The call confirms a sequencing change and safety requirement. Later that week, a delay occurs and the main contractor is asked to prove what was said.

1. The subcontractor uses the PiPcall Mobile+ app on their personal or work mobile.
2. All calls via the app are recorded automatically, no need for the user to press anything. No calls from the native dialler are recorded.
3. Calls are routed over the dedicated mobile voice network, not VoIP.
4. Incoming and outgoing calls are both recorded.
5. Recordings are stored securely in the PiPcall cloud, not on the device.
6. Project managers or compliance officers can access, review, and share recordings via the PiPcall admin portal.
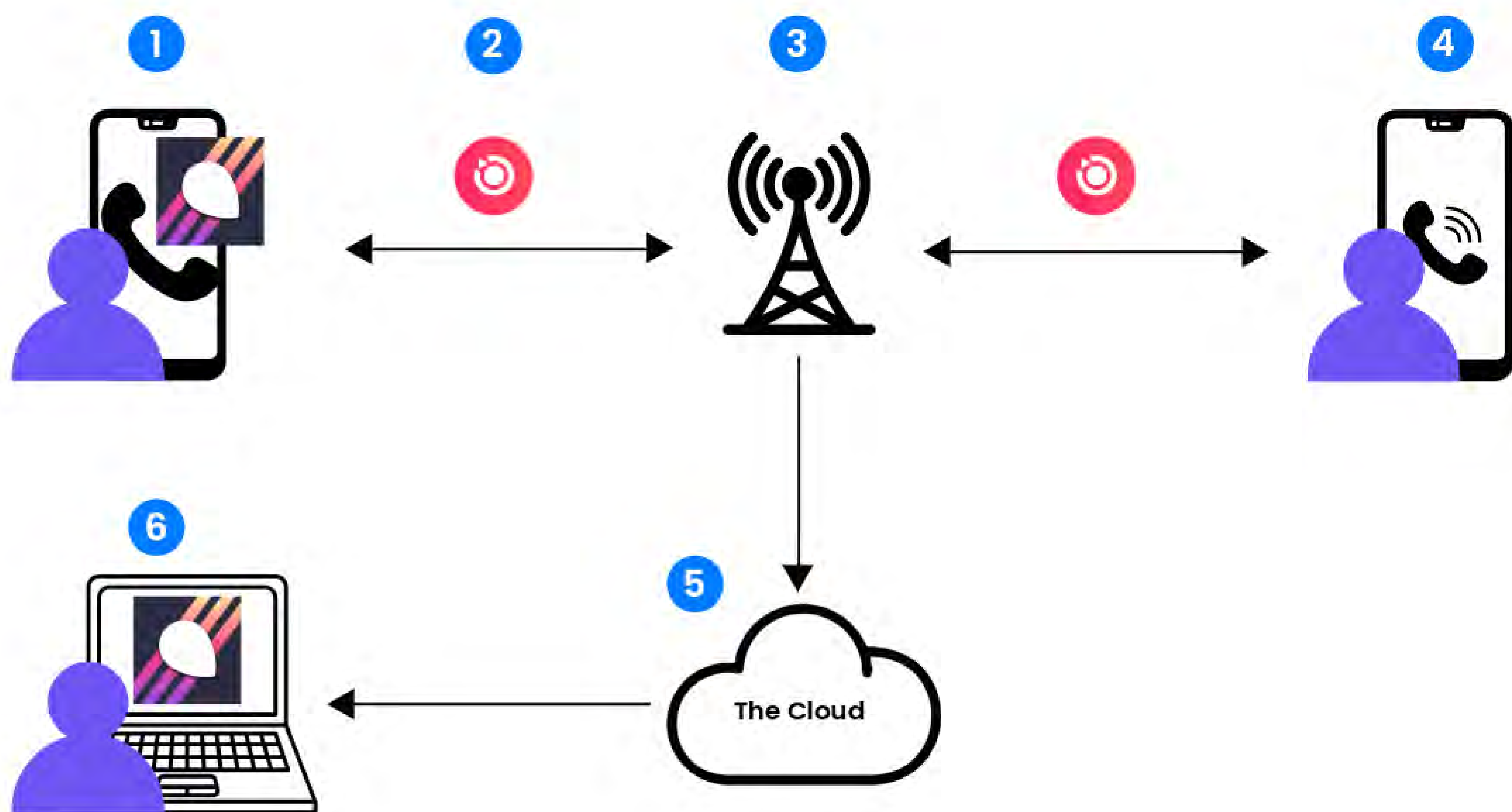
Such records do not remove the need for proper contractual follow-up, but they can materially improve the accuracy of later reconstructions.

The benefits

1. **Works across company-owned and personal devices.**
2. **Brings consistency to mixed contractor and subcontractor teams.**
3. **Floating licences let you cover temporary staff without added cost or complexity.**

Want this level of evidential clarity on your sites?

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Mobile calls shouldn't be a risk. With Mobile+, they're an asset.

Construction sites will always rely on mobile calls.
The difference is whether those calls leave you exposed or protected.

With Mobile+, you get:

• Instant call recording across personal and company phones
• Secure, compliant, cloud-based storage
• Admin and investigator access with full audit trails
• Compatibility with all your teams, even subcontractors
• AI-enhanced insights to improve safety and reduce disputes

All without asking your teams to change how they work.

What can you do next?

1. **Book a construction communication strategy call**
2. **Request a Mobile+ pilot for your team**
3. **Speak to a product expert today**

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