

COLUMNS

5 best-practice tips to create an SMS campaign

March 23, 2011



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While smartphones are all the rage when it comes to mobility, according to a recent study by Gartner, only a fifth of the 1.6 billion mobile devices sold in 2010 were smartphones, meaning most of the mobile devices sold last year were simple text-enabled mobile phones.

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Marketers are recognizing this trend and turning frequently to text messaging as an efficient channel for communicating with customers and prospects.

There are a number of things to consider when creating an SMS marketing campaign.

All too often businesses are hastily adding text messaging to the marketing mix without taking appropriate consideration of all the factors that can make or break the effort.

Because text is still widely considered a personal form of communication, and the risk of being perceived as an unwelcome spammer is high, it is important to incorporate some basic principles into your initiative to ensure you garner optimal results.

Below are five best practices that we encourage businesses to adhere to when designing an SMS campaign:

It is still about the relationships

Above all, it is most important to consider what relationship you or your company have with recipient.

You would not walk up to someone you do not know and say, "I bought this shirt, it was 50 percent off." Generally, you would tell someone you know and you would start with "Hello!" The same applies to SMS marketing.

To avoid having an adverse reaction, you should have an established relationship with the recipient.

That relationship may be that the customer has bought from you before and given you permission to send her texts or is a new potential customer who indicated interest in your products or services.

Personal communication, personal message

Just like email or snail mail, if the letter is addressed to someone personally she is more likely to read it than a message addressed to "home owner" or "customer."

Text messages are short, simple and personal. If what you want to say is none of those things you should find another medium to say it.

A great example is: "Hi Sam, thank you for purchasing with us. We look forward to seeing you again soon. Show this msg to receive 20% off your next purchase at [STORE NAME & PHONE NUMBER]."

Value and timing are everything

Part of understanding your audience is knowing what they will find valuable and when.

Do not leave your recipients wondering what to do with your message. Text messages should not be used for billboard type advertising. Include a call to action with a special deal or request for response.

Regular consumers of a product or service love specials. A beauty salon offering 20 percent off all waxing and tanning for bookings made that week is a great example.

A return customer will want to know about these specials, which should yield positive results for the SMS campaign.

Also consider the timing of your message and be sensitive to the activity of daily life.

A message received during times of the day when people are generally preoccupied will

not likely garner the attention you are seeking.

Understand your market, choose an appropriate time to send the messages out and make it meaningful.

Protect your business and brand

Common short codes are numbers that are shorter than phone numbers and leveraged by companies to send and receive messages.

For example, Twitter users can send text messages to short code 40404 to update their status or send a “tweet.”

Something that is little known is that there are both dedicated and shared short codes you can buy from your SMS gateway provider.

While they may be somewhat cheaper, a shared short code means you are likely sharing that code with multiple other businesses.

This means your service may be disrupted if another company sharing your code abuses the service, you may not get to use the keywords you desire for your campaign and you do not own the information gathered through the interaction with your customers.

Find an SMS service provider that offers dedicated codes so you can protect your brand and leverage useful customer data collected.

Give them an option

Nothing is more frustrating to individuals than to continuously receive promotional messages when they just are not interested.

Consumers are often concerned that they are being charged a premium to receive promotional text messages, so if you tell people up front how it works, then they are more likely to allow you to continue sending messages.

“Reply ‘STOP’ to unsubscribe” is all you need to include in the text message to make it easy for recipients to opt-out.

While it may be easy to set up an account, draft a message and send it to a list of individuals, just like any other successful marketing campaign, understanding your audience and how they prefer to receive information is key to accomplishing your campaign goals.

Make the effort to tailor your campaign through careful consideration of factors that can affect its effectiveness and you will be on your way to experiencing the outstanding benefits of a well-executed text campaign.

Above all, use common sense. If you would find it annoying, somebody else will, too.

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