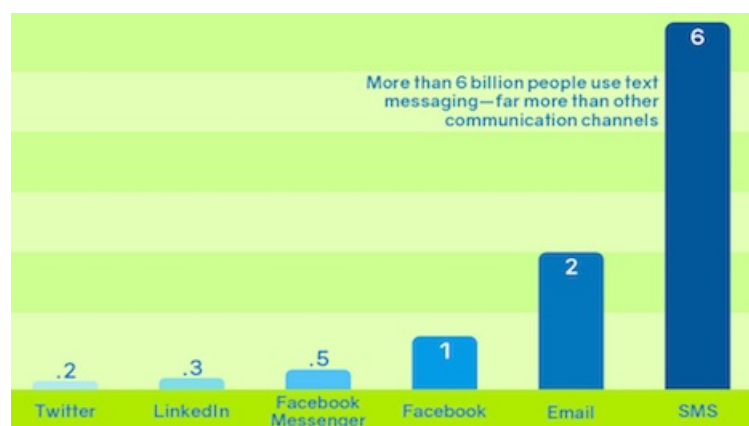


COLUMNS

## SMS helps retailers with sales and customer engagement

November 1, 2016



*Text stands tallest among all. Graphic courtesy of OpenMarket*

By **Andy Shirey**

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Ninety-seven percent of United States smartphone users are texting at least once a day. On top of that, 75 percent of millennials that elusive age group whose attention all retailers are vying for choose to text over taking a call. These numbers are not just a mobile marketer's hopes and dreams they are statistical facts.

According to a recent survey conducted by Internet Retailer, the vast majority of retailers 71 percent to be exact are dropping the ball, and missing out on this massive customer engagement opportunity.

Luckily for them, it is not too late to catch up.

### Getting the message

Retailers can begin incorporating SMS, or text messaging, into their communications and engagement strategies to proactively interact with their customers.

These are consumers who naturally turn to their smartphone's text messages in record time, to achieve maximum business results. After all, it is what everyone is demanding.

Before we can dig into the "how," let us focus a bit more on the "why." After all, with mobile being so commonplace, can that many retailers really be missing the market?

Let us look at the numbers.

Despite 83 percent of SMS messages being opened within 90 seconds, in Internet Retailer's industry survey, the results revealed that SMS was among the least-used methods of communication retailers use to reach their customer despite a handful of major global brands relying on SMS to reach their target customers, and that 80 percent of consumers cite that they are receiving text messages from companies they do business with, according to eWeek.

In this sense, the success metrics of SMS, such as its high ROI, are those brands' best kept secret.

According to the same survey, however, retailers cite a real interest in trying new and innovative ways to boost revenue. And more than half of them 69 percent say that if they saw an opportunity to drive revenue or improve

customer experience, they would be compelled to give SMS in particular a try.

In this case, surveys such as these will hopefully be enough to convince. An industry focused on numbers cannot ignore such glaring statistics.

Now, let us take a deeper look at the compelling success rates of SMS.

Open and shut

For starters, SMS has an unprecedented reach and unmatched timeliness.

Which other communication technology is able to provide instantaneous feedback and almost guaranteed open rates? It does not get much better than nearly 90 percent of text messages being read within just more than a minute. And has it been mentioned yet that it is easy?

SMS is by far the most convenient and stress-free communication method for consumers to use, so no wonder it is their preferred platform of choice. Simplicity, in today's digital age, is bliss.

As for those retailers who have discovered the perks of SMS, they will tell you it is also a great way to differentiate yourself from the pack or they will not, so that they can keep it that way.

In fact, 69 percent of retailers report that they use SMS communications via the implementation of text message programs to differentiate themselves, and 79 percent actually measure the success of their SMS programs directly against increased revenue and improved customer experience.

Last, but perhaps most importantly, SMS enhances the customer experience. It does this through personalization thanks to its capability to send direct messages at the right time with specific, tailor-made content only for the consumer's eyes only.

This is also the number one reason why retailers who got into the SMS game early, drew them in, and they measure their success with SMS through overall improved customer experiences.

SO NOW THAT we know the problem missed opportunities and the why the undeniable benefits of SMS that leads us to the how. Fortunately, this is simple.

Retailers can deploy many successful SMS use cases throughout their organizations by integrating SMS into their existing workflows and communication strategies.

These retailers will not only be giving their customers what they want through simple, personalized delivery mechanisms, but they will also still be ahead of the pack since 52 percent of retailers in the Internet Retailer survey said an SMS campaign is not currently a high priority.

So be in the minority and go win more customers now.



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