

COLUMNS

How to make the messaging trend work for your business

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Cutting to the chase

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It is a great time to be a marketer. We no longer have to spend millions of dollars on a Super Bowl ad to make the same impact as a Snapchat filter of a taco.

We live in an era where we have more data at our fingertips, more channels to reach our customers, and more tools to reach consumers than ever before.

Despite these developments, many businesses still rely on outdated and ineffective strategies for communicating with consumers online.

Inboxes are still plagued by spam, social media has turned into an ad platform, and even modern solutions such as live chat are often impersonal and difficult to use.

Messaging has recently emerged as a more natural way for businesses to engage with consumers. It is quickly surpassing traditional and expensive communication channels such as email, phone and even social media for customer engagement: more than 53 percent of consumers say they are more likely to shop with a business they can message, and there are literally dozens of messaging products that can facilitate this.

The good news is that businesses can now talk to consumers in a way that feels familiar to them even fun and build the types of relationships that foster loyalty in the long-run. Just like we used to before the Internet age.

It also means, as marketers, that we need to pivot from how we have delivered marketing messages for the past 20 years, otherwise consumers will start to ignore us through yet another channel. So where do we begin?

State your goal

Unlike mass email, tweets or television commercials, well-targeted messages can help you achieve concrete business goals.

So before you send your first message, state your goal a real goal, not a gameable metric such as high open rates.

For example, if you want to announce a new product, feature or promotion, your goal would be "adoption."

A high open rate is just an intermediate step towards your actual goal: to increase adoption of the new feature.

Once you have set your goal and know what success looks like, you are ready to answer a few more key questions before sending your message.

Target your audience

Who do you want to reach? Who would find your message relevant? Is it all of your customers, or just the active ones? Is it free or VIP customers?

If a customer has not logged into your application for years, it is probably not worth sending them the exact same message you would send your active customers.

Messaging is intended to be personal, 1:1 communication. Use data to segment your recipient list into the smallest group that would find the message useful or interesting and no more than that.

Decide what triggers it (aka "Would you like fries with that?")

When does the recipient need to hear your message? If you are McDonald's, do you ask consumers if they would like to buy fries right after their meal, or when they are ordering a burger?

With messaging, you do not have to wait for a customer to be back at her computer. Pick the time that makes the most sense based on your goal. Sometimes this means messaging them while she is in your app.

Select your channel

Where in the Internet do you imagine your recipient to be? Do you want to engage her when she is on your Web site or when she is logged into your app? Or perhaps while she is idly browsing her email inbox? Or is it when she is sneaking in some Facebook time?

Again, selecting the channel goes back to your goal.

If your goal is reduce churn during onboarding flow, you would be better off sending an in-app message with guidance on getting to that next step.

Write the message

Messaging is a short, snappy, rapid-fire medium that is increasingly consumed on mobile.

Does it really make sense to write hundreds of words in your message to announce a minor update? Probably not.

What is the minimum viable message that you need to convince consumers to take the action you want them to take? Stay as close to that as possible.

You also may want to rethink the specific words you use when communicating through a messaging interface versus email or another medium.

Messaging is personal and casual. "Dear valued customer" is not going to work here.

Contractions, everyday language and even an emoji or two will go a long way to connect you with your target customer.

MESSAGING PRESENTS a world of opportunities for businesses to engage customers in truly meaningful ways.

To take advantage of this trend, we need to get away from old school email marketing thinking, and message our consumers just like they would message each other: in ways that are relevant, direct and personal.



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