

MARKETING

How text message marketing can improve brand loyalty

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Consumers are looking for perks from text message marketing. Image credit: Facebook

By SARAH RAMIREZ

With the exponential growth of ecommerce, including smartphone and social shopping, and consumers' increased desire for personalized conversations, brands should not overlook text messaging as a marketing channel.

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According to the [2021 SMS Marketing Consumer Trends Report](#) from text messaging platform Attentive, online shopping has also shifted from desktops to smartphones. As more brands introduce SMS programs to reach shoppers, consumers are signing up to receive discounts, exclusive updates and build closer relationships.

"We've found that consumers not only want to engage with brands they care most about, but they want to feel a more direct and personal connection to those brands," said Brooke Burdge, senior vice president of marketing at [Attentive](#), New York. "This can be accomplished when brands are equipped with the data they need to fully understand their audiences, and the right tools to reach their audiences."

The report is based on a survey of 2,000 U.S. consumers ages 16 to 75, conducted between October and December 2020. The generational breakdown of consumers was 19 percent Gen Z, 31 percent millennial, 31 percent Gen X and 19 percent baby boomer.

Text opportunities

COVID-19 lockdowns have helped push almost three-quarters of consumers to shop more online than in 2019.

Online shoppers are also thinking mobile-first, with 56.7 percent primarily shopping on smartphones. Another 36.7 percent of consumers report using mobile devices and desktops about equally when shopping online.

Consumers are also using their smartphones across the entire buying journey from discovery, research, purchase and tracking. With what amounts to a captive audience, brands should leverage text messaging to enhance the mobile shopping experience.



Shoppers who sign up for text messages from brands are among the most loyal. Image credit: Tinuiti

Attentive found that 91 percent of shoppers express interest in signing up for brand texts, although enthusiasm varies.

More than 55 percent of respondents already receive texts from businesses, while 24.6 percent would sign up for messages from the right brand. Less than one in 10, 9.6 percent, are not interested in brand texts.

Additionally, two-thirds of shoppers, 66.5 percent, signed up for SMS programs from more brands in 2020 than the year prior.

SMS programs also allow brands to apply segmentation strategies to send more personalized messages.

While shoppers are motivated by discounts or incentives such as free gifts to subscribe to texts, consumers are also interested in learning more about their favorite brands.

"For luxury brands in particular, understanding what a consumer is most interested in whether it's tailored product recommendations texted to them based on their previous actions, or learning more about the brand's story will help them to establish more customer loyalty and in turn, drive more revenue through personalized text messaging," Ms. Burdge said.

Among Attentive's luxury clients are Rebecca Minkoff and Stuart Weitzman.

After discounts, shoppers are most enthusiastic about receiving loyalty benefits, product updates and exclusive content via text. Product alerts and recommendations as well as store event updates can also be popular.

Almost six in 10 consumers want to hear from brands multiple times a week, but it is essential for brands to share relevant messages whether it means a text tailored to their interests or a time-sensitive update. Incorporating multimedia through GIF, images or video can also improve engagement and increase the likelihood of conversions.

Two-way street

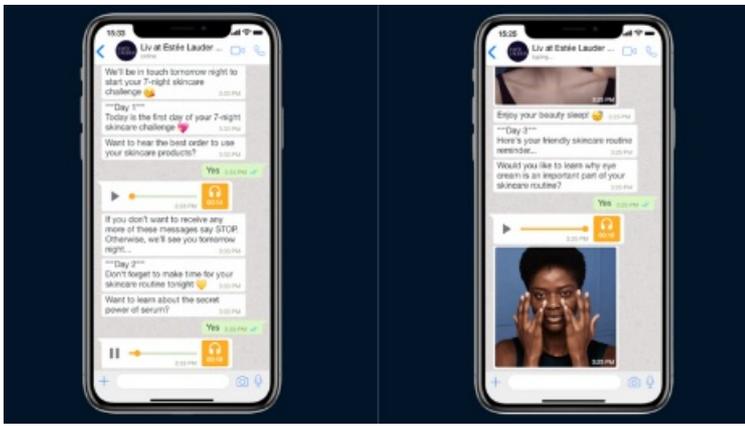
Brands experimenting with SMS marketing should also remember that text messaging is typically a two-way communication channel. With that in mind, many consumers also want to reach out to brands through text.

Almost 70 percent of shoppers report they would be "extremely likely" or "likely" to reach a brand via text for customer service support. Another 24.4 percent would also consider asking questions through texts.

When a consumer needs support, text messaging simplifies the process by replacing the need to write an email or fill out an online contact form. The instant, real-time nature of texting also appeals to shoppers who are phone call-avoidant.

Since many brands may not have fully incorporated customer service in their SMS programs, consumers instead turn to mobile apps, chatbots and social media for support in addition to email and phone calls.

Beauty group Estée Lauder Companies launched new digital channels for customer care, recognizing that not all clients were interested in long waits to speak with an advisor on the phone. The introduction of its WhatsApp live chat also encourages asynchronous conversations as questions arise, rather than focusing solely on complaints further building relationships between shopper and brand ([see story](#)).



The Estée Lauder chatbot on WhatsApp. Image credit: Rehab Agency

In a similar move, IWC Schaffhausen and social network Facebook introduced a chatbot for the launch of the Swiss watch brand's 2020 Portugieser collection. The virtual one-on-one Messenger chat with a virtual advisor is designed to improve IWC's customer communications ([see story](#)).

However, the benefits of chatbots should not be seen as a substitute for SMS marketing.

"Text messaging is an incredibly personalized and effective marketing approach, driving 18.5 percent of online revenue for brands," Attentive Mobile's Ms. Burdge said. "Typically, a consumer's texts are reserved for close friends, family and their favorite brands, so it inherently feels more personal and like a direct connection.

"When compared to other offerings like chatbot chatbots are focused on customer service and require the user to be on the brand's website or in Facebook Messenger," she said. "While text messaging, on the other hand, is embedded more as part of the full customer lifecycle and meets the audience where they already are."

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