

COLUMNS

## When to use push notifications versus SMS messaging

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With many mobile users hardly functioning without peeking at their phones every few minutes, businesses have realized that one of the best ways to reach an engaged consumer is on their mobile device, whether that be through a push notification or an SMS text message.

Sending a personalized message that offers something of value to consumers is a powerful marketing tool the ultimate communication cannon.

Businesses are still learning and discovering new ways to use SMS mass texting and push notifications as consumer engagement forces. Each technology possesses its own strengths and it is important to understand what those are when creating a mobile marketing strategy.

### Context

All of those applications that you have downloaded on your smartphone? It is very likely that one of those apps sent a message not an SMS that popped up on your phone at some point.

With the advent and continued evolution of applications, push notifications were born to alert users of updates regarding the app, new messages, account issues, and, of course, likes.

Push notifications work by sending a message to the inbox or displaying on the main screen of a consumer's smartphone, similar to a pop-up ad in a browser. The message could contain an offer, a greeting, a notification, or an account notice all designed to focus the consumer's attention to the app that they downloaded.

While push notifications are relatively new in the grand scheme of mobile, SMS, on the other hand, is a well-established technology.

However, businesses have only begun using it to communicate with their customers within the past five years. Text messages from a business can also offer promotions, reminders, funny messages, updates and notifications.

### Advantages of push notifications

Let us start with some of the advantages of push notifications a strategy associated with smartphone app technology.

Many consider push notifications to be a less intrusive marketing tactic than text messaging, since messages can be delivered without interrupting the user in their current activity, and never incur an additional cost.

Businesses do not need opt-in consent to send a push notification, because the user has essentially opted in by downloading the app.

Unlike SMS, push is not regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, Federal Trade Commission or the telecommunications firms, so there are far fewer limitations.

Finally, push is not restricted when it comes to character length or formatting, whereas SMS is capped at 160 characters, including spaces.

#### SMS messaging strengths

While push notifications have certain advantages, they are only relevant for smartphone users, whereas SMS is the second most common activity on all mobile phones, behind talking, with 90 percent of text messages being read within three minutes of delivery.

Many push notifications go unread or users simply opt to turn them off from a particular app.

With SMS texting, marketers are not limited to communicating only with users who have downloaded their app, and users cannot turn them off unless they opt out of the list.

Businesses can run a myriad of campaigns offering promotions to encourage new users to join their SMS marketing lists.

From a small local boutique to a Fortune 500 company, anyone can send an SMS message without having an app. For companies without an app, SMS can be a means to execute one, or many, campaigns at once, without going through the trouble and expense of building a standalone app.

SMS campaigns can include text links that drive users to any page on the mobile Web through their device, while push notifications only drive people to one isolated app. This makes SMS a better channel to promote social content, landing pages or microsites created for distinct programs outside of app content.

Since the user does not need an app to get a text, SMS blasts blow push notifications out of the water when it comes to overall reach.

#### Difference is in the audience

Ultimately, the two messaging platforms serve different audiences.

If a company is trying to improve targeted communication about their product to existing customers within their app, push notification is absolutely the way to go.

However, for broader, more horizontal communications, SMS will always come out on top.

Understanding the distinction in how these messaging platforms work will make all the difference when it comes to making smart decisions about whether or not to dive into app technology, and mobile marketing strategy overall.

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