

COLUMNS

## How small businesses can take advantage of SMS

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Mobile marketing may seem elusive, too far out of reach for many small and midsize businesses. There are so many digital and non-digital marketing channels in our modern fragmented media universe that a somewhat new-to-the-party medium such as mobile is overlooked amidst natural skepticism.

Not all businesses have the resources and budget to research, validate, trial and prove new methodologies for spending their marketing dollars.

But there are aspects of mobile specifically, SMS text messaging that have inherent value to a wide audience of consumers, which makes it a natural fit for all businesses.

Consider that SMS is a direct communications technology that millions of consumers across a wide range of demographic groups use every day.

Consider also the far greater potential reach of SMS more than 270 million mobile devices nationwide than mobile Web, applications or mobile advertising.

Finally consider that the costs for entry are relatively low, and the resources required to manage multiple successful programs can be low, too.

But arguments such as these only make sense hypothetically.

So how do small and midsize businesses leverage SMS effectively on a pragmatic day-to-day basis? How do they visibly affect customer relationships and drive bottom-line value?

SMS can be effective across a variety of business objectives and real-world applications. Here are some examples:

Customer acquisition

Use SMS to leverage existing offline media and promotional campaigns. Get more out of your campaigns and drive foot and online traffic with a convenient direct-response component

Customer retention

Give customers the opportunity to opt-in for ongoing communications such as upcoming promotions, discounts and event notices

Given up on event marketing? Instead of trying to capture email addresses, let consumers opt-in quickly and easily with their mobile phone and deliver instant value with a text message discount that they can use today

Recurring revenue

Remember, 160 characters can dramatically affect a consumer's impression of a brand or product, and SMS is ideal for providing laser-precise timing for offers and updates directed to your customers in a highly personal channel

By simply using a handful of different key words you can create very simple lists targeting distinct audiences.

Think of the difference between families at sporting events and community fundraisers, as opposed to college students at a nearby campus. Now you can target the right information and offers to the right people at the right time. News flash: college students keep different hours and spending habits than families

SMS is great way for encouraging customers to trial new products and visit new locations. If a customer likes a certain brand of clothing or soap, for example, send an SMS letting her know when you have new products that she might be interested in

Differentiated customer experience

In-store SMS campaigns allow for on-demand access to information and savings. Provide the customer with an instant coupon for use in-store or simply allow the customer to receive more information about a product

Provide alerts and reminders for key events such as payment dates, account balances and status, delivery status and appointment reminders

Stimulate engagement with polls, surveys and simple games or trivia, and reward those who participate

Small and midsize businesses can take advantage of these SMS opportunities today.

The cost of entry is low, and the resources to manage successful programs are budget-friendly.

This does not mean that marketers can afford to tip-toe into mobile marketing or launch poorly executed, short-term trial campaigns. This approach will yield underwhelming results.

Commitment is necessary. But the prospect of reaching a diverse and receptive audience of 230-million plus consumers should be the natural incentive.

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