

COLUMNS

## SMS is no longer the ugly duckling of marketing

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In case you do not remember the story of the Ugly Duckling, it is a tale written by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, who penned many well-known folk and fairy tales. This one is about a duckling that was considered ugly until he grows into a beautiful swan. What does this have to do with SMS?

Actually, SMS has a lot in common with the ugly duckling.

For a long time, it had the reputation of being an inferior form of marketing ineffective, intrusive, a passing trend or just plain "ugly." What is happening now, however, is that SMS is transforming into the "swan" of marketing as people are starting to see its true value.

Why SMS was considered ugly

All types of marketing are controversial to some degree.

People have complained about television commercials, direct mail (more commonly known as "junk mail"), commercial emails and, yes, SMS, or text message marketing.

The main reason why marketing gets a bad reputation is that it is considered annoying or intrusive.

By the time SMS marketing was developed, people were already using the word "spam" to describe unwanted emails.

Indeed, spam was and continues to be a serious problem with email.

As mobile phones and text messaging became more popular, the fear arose that SMS was going to be the text message version of spam.

No one likes the idea of having their phone constantly buzzing with unwanted texts from big companies and, even worse, spammers and scammers.

Another factor that contributed to the perception of SMS as marketing's ugly duckling was the issue of cost.

While sending emails is virtually free, there is cost associated with sending text messages.

In the past, depending on the type of plan the user has, it can also cost the recipient money to receive texts. So SMS marketing was widely perceived as expensive, both for businesses and customers, making it seem like a not very economical option.

Image and reality of SMS is changing

Many things have changed in the world of SMS marketing in the last few years. Several factors have made this type of marketing far more attractive to businesses and consumers as well.

Many of the realities that contributed to SMS's ugly-duckling reputation have changed significantly. For example:

**Focus on permission-based marketing:** Since 2013, it has been illegal for businesses to send text messages to customers without permission.

While there are still spammers out there, legitimate businesses now realize that it is much more effective and safer to use legal and transparent methods to get customers' permission.

**Text messaging is more economical:** Most contemporary mobile phone plans include unlimited texting. This removes customers' anxiety about having to pay for text messages.

Meanwhile, SMS marketing has gotten more sophisticated as well, making it possible for businesses to send targeted texts with smart texting systems that get good results.

**Texting has become mainstream:** As mobile phone use has grown exponentially, so has the increased popularity of texting as a form of communication.

Consumers are getting more comfortable with texting for both social and business purposes.

**Proven responsiveness:** Compared to other types of marketing, such as online ads, direct mail and email, text messages have a proven responsiveness.

Ninety-eight percent of text messages are actually opened, which is many times greater than the number of emails opened.

**SMS not as pretty as flashing ads, but has proven utility**

As we have seen, the history of SMS marketing was not especially pretty.

Customers and marketers alike had reasons to consider it annoying and costly. Due to changes in technology, laws and perception, however, this is rapidly changing.

Mobile devices are becoming the dominant form of communication, with more than 75 percent of the world's population now owning a mobile phone.

When used in a targeted manner, businesses are discovering that they can get a great deal of value with SMS campaigns.

MANY CUSTOMERS actually welcome the chance to receive timely information from businesses that they patronize.

These are some of the reasons that the days of SMS being the ugly duckling of marketing are gone and people are starting to see this flexible type of marketing as the utility that it truly is.

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