helping customers get the message

## social and email get results - but only some of the time

Direct messaging channels, such as email or application-based messaging, provide businesses and their customers with a convenient way to communicate one-on-one.

Brands can use direct messaging in a variety of ways, from customer service to sales outreach. Direct messaging allows brands to communicate in a private message, which gives users greater security and peace of mind if they need to share sensitive information to help resolve an issue. Public channels such as tweets or Facebook posts provide none of those benefits.

Direct messaging is more discreet than a phone conversation, making it ideal when customers don't want to be overheard or interrupted. It's also faster than calling and waiting for an agent, and more convenient for sharing detailed information such as lengthy account numbers.

Direct messaging is ideal for:

- Sending or requesting sensitive information

- Troubleshooting an issue

- Gathering private feedback about customer service interactions

- Personalizing interactions

- Addressing inventory and availability inquiries, ordering and reservations

- Asking customers for feedback about products and services
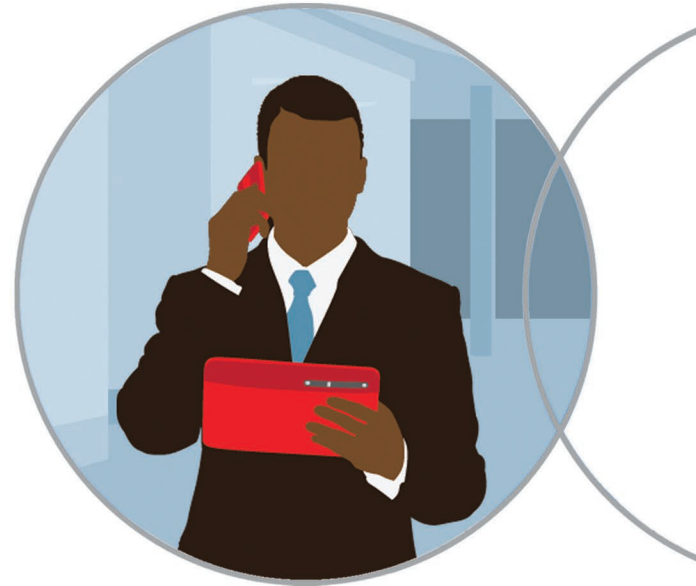
why text is tops

But many direct messaging channels fall short. E-mail has an open rate of just 20%[1]. Why? Over half of emails are spam[2], so consumers are conditioned to ignore them.

Those bleak numbers are why savvy businesses, nonprofits, government agencies and other organizations are increasingly turning to text messaging when they want to inform and engage customers and prospects. Also known as short message service (SMS), text messages have the highest open rate of all messaging types and only a 3% spam rate. In fact, 93% of consumers consider text messaging to be a trusted communications environment[3].

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[1] https://www.gsma.com/futurenetworks/digest/rcs-b2c-campaigns
[2] https://www.ctia.org/the-wireless-industry/infographics-library
[3] https://www.ctia.org/the-wireless-industry/infographics-library

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Texting also is nearly ubiquitous. Every mobile phone sold over the past 20 years has an SMS application pre-installed. Every mobile operator in the world supports SMS, and most include texting with every voice plan.

Many businesses now have smartphone apps, but they have three major limitations. First, not every customer knows about the app. Second, many consumers are unwilling to download them, such as when their phone's memory is already full of photos and other apps. Business apps often are among the things they delete to free up space.

Third, many businesspeople have company-issued phones that are locked so they can't install unauthorized apps. In the case of travel and hospitality companies, for example, an app can be the least effective way to communicate with business travelers.

Text messaging also leverages the channel that most consumers already use to communicate with friends and family every day. Americans exchange an average of 2 trillion text messages a year, and the number continues to increase.[4] One reason is immediacy: People know they are more likely to get a response right away than if they call or email.

In fact, although social media messaging platforms are popular, their daily usage still lags far behind SMS.[5] One reason is because social messaging requires users to download an app. Another is that the platforms are incompatible with one another. SMS doesn't have those limitations—one more reason why texting is the most effective way for businesses to inform and engage people.

Bottom line: Text messaging cannot be beat when it comes to ubiquity, immediacy, convenience, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness. That makes it ideal for enabling one-on-one conversations with customers and one-to-many communications, such as marketing campaigns.

inform, engage and wow

SMS also reaches people in ways that traditional print and broadcast advertising cannot. For example, a resort could text each guest with information about a concert or other local event based on their profile preferences. Leisure travelers rarely read local newspapers or watch local TV, so they would miss out on those events.

Guests could also text housekeeping to have more towels delivered to their room. That's also an example of how SMS can work with artificial intelligence (AI). Instead of a human fielding those text messages, an AI-powered chatbot could respond that they will be delivered shortly, and then trigger an alert to housekeeping with the request. A chatbot also could serve as a virtual concierge to respond to common questions sent via text, such as whether any of the resort's bars will have live music that night.

Texting makes it quick and easy for consumers to act on promotions and other outbound marketing messages. For example, resort guests could reply to an event promotion and be directly connected with the concierge who can arrange for tickets and transportation.

[4] https://www.ctia.org/news/2019-annual-survey-highlights

[5] https://www.statista.com/statistics/814803/frequency-with-which-us-internet-users-visit-facebook-messenger

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Offering a text-for-support option can also help reduce customer churn. For instance, 39% of Americans who canceled a contract with a company in the past 24 months cited customer service as the primary reason.[6] For 18%, a single negative experience—such as sitting on hold to get information—was enough for them to switch companies. Another study says the amount is even higher: 32%.[7]

Businesses can minimize those problems by giving customers the option of texting instead of calling. For instance, when customers receive a payment reminder, they can text back with any questions. In fact, 85% of consumers say they want to be able to message brands in the same way they were contacted.[8]

implementation complexity

If SMS has so many benefits, why doesn't every organization use it for direct messaging? A major reason is that although SMS might appear as straightforward as email, implementing it requires expertise in telecom nuances such as mobile operator requirements, number types, routing, federal laws, connection protocols, character encoding, delivery receipts and more. This expertise ensures that the right people get the right messages at the right time—but very few businesses have that expertise on staff.

A successful implementation integrates SMS with an organization's existing communications systems. For example, toll-free and office landlines should be text-enabled because consumers expect to be able to send messages to business numbers.

Integration with workflows, business processes and CRM systems also are critical. Businesses need a way to centrally manage their text messages. For example, an auto dealership network needs a way to store and analyze text conversations by hundreds of employees across a dozen locations. That way, salespeople—including new ones—can quickly review conversation histories to understand each customer's unique needs and wants. Meanwhile, its marketing team can review those conversations to create personalized SMS promos based on history and preferences.

Compliance with federal texting regulations is another key requirement. By law, customers must be able to opt-out of future messages by simply texting a keyword, such as "stop." This process also should be automated so it takes effect immediately, which also eliminates the expense of having employees do that manually.

[6] https://techsee.me/resources/surveys/2019-insurance-churn-survey

[7] https://www.pwc.de/de/consulting/pwc-consumer-intelligence-series-customer-experience.pdf

[8] https://techcrunch.com/2016/09/12/twilio-study-most-consumers-now-want-to-use-messaging-to-interact-with-businesses

ensuring a successful implementation

To ensure a successful, cost-effective implementation, organizations can turn to a partner that has decades of experience with SMS, as well as, longstanding relationships with mobile operators worldwide.

For example, an experienced partner knows which content categories do not require user opt-in, such as non-solicitation messages that are informational. These include appointment updates and reminders about upcoming bill-due dates. These include appointment updates and reminders about upcoming bill-due dates.

An experienced partner also can help organizations develop, refine and execute their SMS strategies. One example is identifying areas of the business to begin using SMS, along with an implementation plan to help businesses execute, monitor and evaluate results. These insights help ensure a solid foundation when the implementation expands to the rest of the organization and scales up. A successful initial set of implementations is key for getting executive support for expansion.
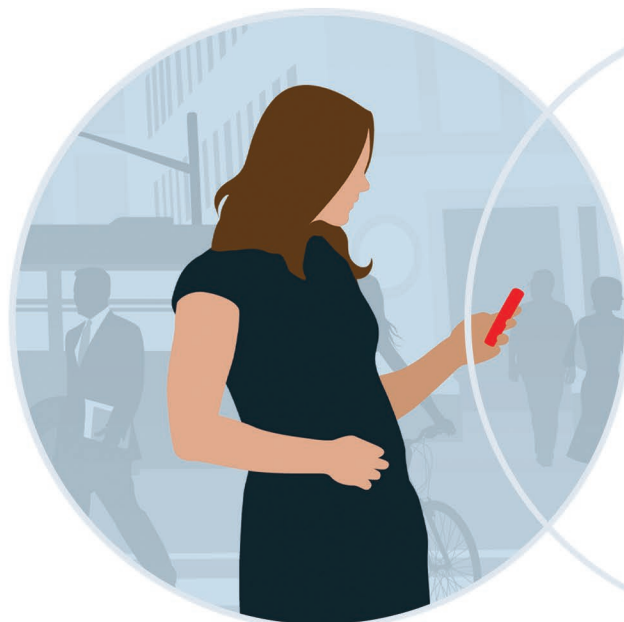
how to get started

The TruReach Deliver Aerialink platform provides enterprises, non-profits, government agencies, communication platform-as-a-service (CPaaS) providers and other organizations with a proven way to reach customers and optimize their omni-channel engagement.

about iconectiv

Your business and your customers need to access and exchange information simply, seamlessly and securely. iconectiv's extensive experience in information services and its unmatched numbering intelligence helps you do just that. In fact, more than 2B people count on our platforms each day to keep their networks, devices and applications connected. Our cloud-based Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions span network and operations management, numbering, trusted communications and fraud prevention. For more information, visit www.iconectiv.com. Follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

make the connection.

For more information about iconectiv, contact your local account executive, or you can reach us at:

+1 732.699.6800
info@iconectiv.com
www.iconectiv.com

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