The Basic Guide to SMS
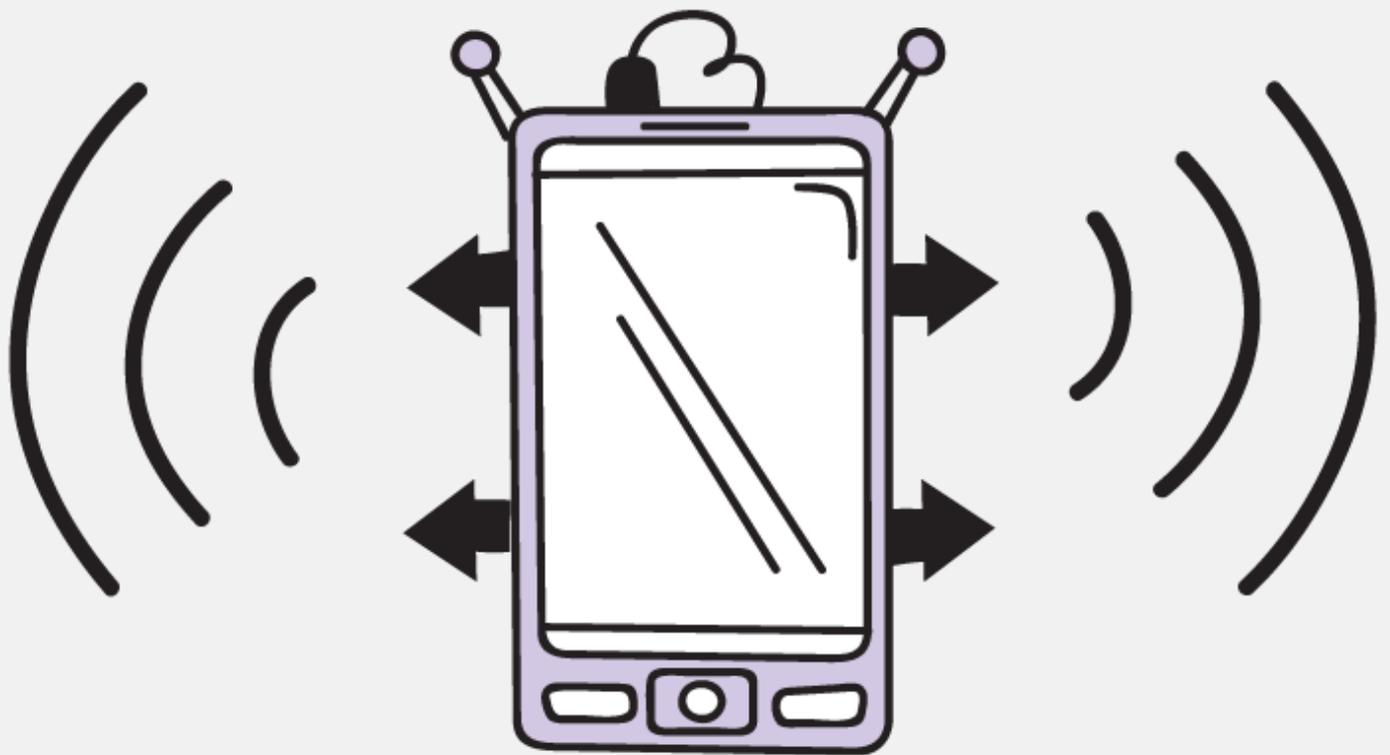
THE BASIC GUIDE TO SMS MARKETING

This guide talks about the basic things you need to know about SMS Marketing before you start sending out SMS campaigns.

This guide covers the following topics:

- The pros and cons of SMS
- What does SMS software like Maxmail do?
- SMS and Anti Spam legislation
- SMS Checklist

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THE PROS AND CONS OF SMS MARKETING

Pros

- Instant delivery – good for time limited communication, e.g. notifications, appointment booking reminders, last minute cancellations or detail changes
- Proven high open rates in studies
- Short and succinct messaging – generally absorbed better
- No design considerations required
- Rendering in different programs not an issue
- Smart phones – can click through URLs to visit web pages/ view videos
- Easy and instant sign up/ opt in (because phone on the person at most times)
- Coupon Codes stored in the phone and can be presented at point of sale more readily than email.
- Quick gathering of audience opinion using SMS polling
- Ability to use it in lifecycle marketing campaigns (what's this link)as an auto-response to an action so that you're in the right place at the right time.
- Highly personalized messaging

Cons

- Limit of 160 characters (and opt out messaging is compulsory so even fewer)
- More expensive as charged per message
- No branding available
- Not everyone has a smartphone so can't assume that users will be able to easily click through to links and view web pages/ videos
- Less likely to forward to a friend than email because of cost involved
- Because it's more invasive – as SMS marketing becomes more popular the current advantage of high open rates (which incidentally cannot actually be tracked) will decline
- Fewer analytics available to measure performance
- Less chance of tracking e.g. forwards

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WHAT DOES SMS SOFTWARE DO?

Of course, you need to find the right SMS software for your needs. To do this, it is best to decide what you want to accomplish with your marketing campaign and then get the software that can best service your needs.

Maxmail is full of features that makes SMS Marketing a breeze.

Campaign Creation

The step by step wizard guides you through campaign creation quickly and easily. It also allows you to set up and save templates that can be used for automation . Personalisation is simple with the use of smart tags which insert the unique information in a given field for each recipient – a common example is #firstname# although you can be more creative than this by using e.g. a unique voucher code or last visit to your online store details. It's only limited to what information you hold.

Scheduling

A large number of messages can be scheduled to go out at any time. Beware though because some times are better than others, particularly if your subscriber base is spread across time zones. An SMS at 4am in the morning isn't likely to spark a good response.

Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is a fast growing phenomenon – which is businesses marketing to their consumers who are using mobile and hand held devices to receive/read SMS or email messaging. All the experts in the industry agree that the use of handheld devices including smartphones is growing at a huge rate of knots and mobile marketing will become more and more widely used over time.

But, before you plunge head first into mobile marketing understand the pros and cons of using SMS versus email. It's very likely that these will change in the near future as Mobile marketing becomes more mature, new tools become available and consumer behavior adapts however, for now consider the following.

Auto-responders

A huge range of events can trigger a templated SMS to be fired off. The trigger can be event based such as when someone opens an email, subscribes to a list, fills in a survey with a certain response or they can be time based such as on an anniversary or 1 week before a birthdate.

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Statistics

There aren't as many statistics that can be gathered with SMS as per email – statistics such as opens, clicks or forwards are not possible because the information is controlled by mobile marketing carriers. However Maxmail will allow you to see who the SMS was sent to – what the message was (particularly useful to see a log of auto-responders) and will collate and present replies in an easy to understand format*.

Managing Unsubscribes

Maxmail has a built in unsubscribe facility. The word Stop sent in a reply to any SMS sent from Maxmail will automatically unsubscribe the sender.

SMS Vouchers

SMS is the perfect delivery vehicle for vouchers. A unique code can be generated inside Maxmail and sent to a consumer, who can then redeem it by presenting it at the point of sale.

Because SMS is delivered instantly, it is perfect for time sensitive offers an example being 50% off lunch menu today and tomorrow at Joe's café.

SMS Surveys Using 2 Way SMS

Simple surveys – or polls can be conducted over SMS and the results are automatically collated and displayed within Maxmail. An example being if I asked all of my customers which fruit they preferred between apple, bananas and oranges when they reply they can be placed in a separate list called apples, or oranges or bananas. We could then set up an auto-responder series for each list which talks about their favorite fruit type and maybe also include a special offer.

SMS and Social Media

Twitter streams accommodate about the same amount of characters as SMS so in some situations it makes sense to post the same message/ offers on Twitter. You can do the same with Facebook.

Shortcodes

Short codes are five or six digit numbers which are common across all the different

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wireless carriers. For example, when users vote on American Idol via text message, it doesn't matter what cell network you are using, you still send your vote to the same short number.

Lower Cost

Because Maxmail buys SMS credits in bulk from various carriers, plus we use some of our own networks, we can pass on a huge saving to our customers. It's worth mentioning that costs are probably going to decrease rapidly over the next couple of years as SMS marketing becomes more popular and competition drives the costs down.

Integrated channels

With Maxmail all your SMS, email, Social Media and Surveys work side by side in a single platform, stats are easily compared and each channel can trigger another as part of a lifecycle series.

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SMS AND ANTI-SPAM LEGISLATION

SMS marketing, or text message marketing, is subject to the same anti-spam legislation as email – e.g. the CAN-SPAM act and the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA).

The basics you need to know about being compliant to these are:

OPT IN: Like email marketing, SMS marketing requires recipients to opt-in to receive messages. A double opt-in (verified by customer after initial sign up) process is considered to be a best practice for both methods, although it is not a legal requirement.

Make sure that you carefully tailor the language in the opt-in process so that the subscriber can easily understand exactly what they are opting into – this includes both topic and frequency..

OPT OUT: You will need to provide a way of opting out of receiving SMS, although because SMS messages are only 160 characters long, it's not feasible to do so inside the message. It's a good idea to publish opt out instructions on your website and if you run a double opt in through email, clearly list the unsubscribe process there.

SMS also falls under mobile phone legislation. In the US this means that the **Telephone Consumer Protection Act** also needs to be adhered to. Essentially, the act prohibits any call that:

- Is made without prior express consent
- Is made using an auto dialling system (different to an SMS marketing platform that stores opted in mobile numbers)
- Is made to a number assigned to a mobile service

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SMS Checklist

There is more to SMS marketing than just plugging in some SMS software and sending out blasts of text messages. Here's a checklist to make sure you have the basics covered.

Question	Comment
Do you have permission to SMS your subscriber list?	Run through the SPAM Checklist and make sure you are compliant with the law
Can your subscribers work out how to unsubscribe?	The unsubscribe process should be made available to your subscribers on your website, in an opt in confirmation email and in the terms and conditions if relevant.
Are any websites that you are providing links to optimized for viewing using a mobile device?	Remember – not everyone has a smartphone yet, those without smartphones will manually type URL in so make sure it's not too long
Have you thought about posting your SMS campaign on Twitter or Facebook?	Have a look at the Social Media tutorials to find out how to set this up.
Do you have enough SMS credits to cover your campaign as well as auto-responders that you have scheduled?	Credits can be purchased from inside Maxmail using a credit card.

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