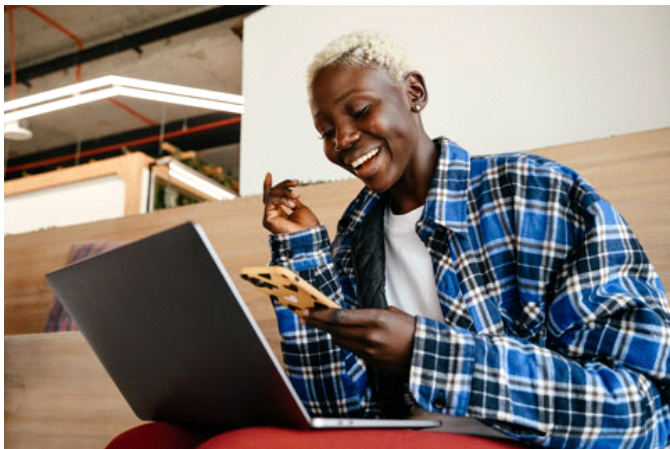


Features

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Kickstart Your Texting Game

Wendy Komanchek



First, you got a website, then you started sending monthly emails. Now it's time for text marketing.

As digital marketing has evolved, you and your staff have learned new ways to stay in touch with your customers. Text marketing allows you to communicate with your customers in real time.

What's Text Marketing and Why Do You Need it?

You've probably opted for text messaging from your hair salon, doctor or dentist. You may also get texts from retailers telling you when they're having a flash sale. At

the end of these messages, there's always a "Reply STOP" or "Opt Out" option.

For the past five years or so, text marketing has grown. It helps you keep your life on track and lets you know of deals at your favorite stores. As you can see, text marketing happens when a customer or a patient gives their phone number to their favorite store or their doctor, then these places send texts for reminders or shopping sales.

Take that convenience and consider how it could benefit your garden center's customer base. Katie Elzer-Peters from The Garden of Words says, "The messaging needs to work together. If you have a hanging basket sale, everything needs to be about your hanging basket sale.

"If it's like you're having a hanging basket sale and that is your big promotion for the week, but over on SMS (short message service), you say, 'Hey, have you gotten your mulch?' You might get some mulch orders, but it will not amplify the rest of your message. And that's what I like about SMS, is that it's just another way to amplify, remind people (you may have sent a hanging basket email on Wednesday or Friday), but then on Saturday, you send an SMS that says, 'Hey, reminder, hanging baskets sale.'

"It's late, they're out and about, and they're like, 'Right, I'm going to go there on the way home,'" Katie explains.

C.L. Fornari, a garden writer who helps her garden center's marketing department, says that text messaging is more immediate.

"When people get a text, they look at it immediately. When people get an email, they think, 'Oh, yeah, it's the garden center newsletter or something from the garden center. I'll look at that later and then it gets buried in the stream,'"

C.L. explains. “And part of the reason that texts are so immediate is that they’re much more visible on your phone.”

SMS Messaging Etiquette

Be careful of spamming your clients. Not only will that turn off your customers, but you can also get blacklisted by mobile phone companies.

Kenneth Burke of Text Request, a text messaging service for businesses, states that while he’s not a lawyer and he’s not giving out legal advice, there are three points to keep in mind when it comes to text messaging your customers:

Don’t hook up with an auto-dialer: An auto-dialer randomly or sequentially dials phone numbers to text them. In that case, there’s zero working or commercial relationship involved. It’s just some automated program going through the phone book.

If a customer gives you their phone number, you have consent to reach out to them through text: “It’s the same for email or if it’s a landline to call. If someone is giving you their contact information, you have consent to reach out to them through that channel,” Kenneth explains.

Tell the customer at the end of the text that they can opt out of text messaging by replying with STOP: “You need to tell them how to opt-out or how to stop receiving these communications if they don’t want them,” he says.

“We typically recommend that wherever you collect contact info, you have a disclaimer that says, ‘Hey, by submitting this form means that you’re consenting to receive texts or phone calls or emails with this contact info or to the info you provided. You can opt-out at any time,’” Kenneth adds.

Developing a List of Subscribers

Kenneth reiterates, “Number one, don’t go out and buy a list of contacts. Don’t do that or don’t do anything where you’re just reaching out for contacts and grabbing them to put into text contacts. On the other hand, Kenneth recommends using smart sales and marketing tactics to land more people willing to give you their mobile phone numbers.

“One is your existing customers. Take them and do something; provide some offer or incentive to get them to opt-in to text. And that could be very common: have the customer put in their phone number at the checkout counter. If it’s online, enter their phone numbers to get 10% or 20% off their first purchase. And then they get into a list for that, a subscriber list,” Kenneth states.

If you have a brick-and-mortar store rather than e-commerce, Kenneth suggests you put signs up at the checkout and throughout the store that say, “Text ‘garden’ to our phone number.”

Alternately, you can set up a QRC or coupon code that signals customers to sign up to your text list.

You also give the customer an offer, such as a coupon or a free pack of seeds, if they use the keyword “garden” when they text your store’s phone number. Kenneth says you can set up an auto-response that says, “Thanks so much for subscribing. Use this 20% coupon at checkout or show this message to the clerk for your discount or free gift.”

Then Kenneth suggests the educational side to getting more people to subscribe to your text messaging program. This marketing part teaches your customers what text marketing is at your garden center and how they’ll benefit.

“On the educational side of things, as a marketer, I like it because so many people who interact with your company online or in person aren’t ready to buy anything,” he says. “And so, many people are searching for information on ‘How do I fix up my yard’ or ‘How do I take care of this type of plant’ and everything in between. And so I like

something similar to an email newsletter, but for text, where you have it on your website and wherever else that people can opt-in to get information about how to be a better gardener.”

C.L. recommends segmenting your customers into groups, such as houseplant lovers, landscapers who buy plant material from you, home gardeners and other groups based on interest and purchase history.

“Every phone call asking about a specific plant, ‘Do you have this?’ The answer should be, ‘Would you like a text when it does come in?’” C.L. says. “Now, of course, that depends on follow-up. Ask that question if you’re willing and able to follow up by sending a text follow-up.”

C.L. continues that somebody in the garden center’s marketing department needs to own that list of people waiting to get a text when a plant comes into the store. Next, C.L. recommends asking these folks, when they call your store, “Would you like to get a text when we get in the newest annual delivery?” or “Would you like to get a text when we have a new shipment of perennials?”

Your garden center's blog and newsletter should provide text messaging opportunities, including sign-up forms.



A Good Example

Katie thinks Koetsier's Greenhouse in Grand Rapids, Michigan, rocks their text marketing.

“Koetsier’s has a great program. Koetsier’s text may be about three times a week or so. They send out their sale information. They’ll also send a tip once or twice a week, which is nice. And then they send a nice little graphic with it,” Katie explains. “One day a few weeks ago, it was really hot and Koetsier’s closed early, so they sent an SMS saying, ‘Hey, we closed early because of the heat. Make sure you water your plants.’”

Text marketing is the next big thing when reaching out to your customers, whether you’re a garden center e-commerce site or you have a brick-and-mortar store. Get your customers’ permission, segment these folks based on their interests and buying history, and watch as your traffic increases to your garden center.

Text Marketing Platforms

Katie Elzer-Peters recommends three types of communication platforms to handle your text message marketing. These three options include:

- [Klaviyo.com](https://www.klaviyo.com), which combines email and text messaging in one platform
- [Attentive.com](https://www.attentive.com) is a stand-alone text message marketing platform
- [Twilio.com](https://www.twilio.com) is an app that integrates with CRM and customer databases

Wendy Komanchek has a passion for helping small- to medium-sized green industry companies succeed. She writes blogs and web copy for garden design, landscape maintenance and lawn care companies. You can learn more about her at [The Landscape Writer](https://www.thelandscapewriter.com) or email her at wendy@landscapewriter.com.