REACHING YOUR AUDIENCE
THROUGH TEXTS

Mobilizing your message via SMS. If you are trying to reach communities of color or youth, you can't ignore mobile outreach. Studies show that these communities access the internet and social media channels use their phones at high rates. But they aren't the only ones.

Audience Targeting

The average person looks at their phone 80 times every day. So it's no surprise that the open rate for text messages is 98 percent, compared to 15 percent (depending on which study you look at) for email. Higher open rates lead to higher action rates, which is why mobile is worth considering for your organization.

As always, start by asking: Who are your target audiences, where are they found and what do you want them to do? Spitfire's Smart Chart® helps you think through these questions and incorporate mobile into your communication strategy.

Mobile Technology

Sending mobile messages is immediate and allows an organization to respond rapidly to an issue and quickly mobilize supporters. Before you get started, it is important to understand a few terms.

+SMS

Short Message Service commonly is referred to as a text message and is limited to 160 characters before being split up into multiple parts.

+Short code

Refers to the five- or six-digit number that people text to join an organization's text messaging list. In the image example below, 22422 is the short code. Short codes in the U.S. are administered by the Common Short Code Administration (CSCA). There are two main types of short codes: dedicated short codes and shared short codes.

A dedicated short code is registered to one organization, like Planned Parenthood's short code in the example to the right. In this case, the short code is a vanity code because it spells out STAND (22422). An organization that has its own short code can create as many keywords – or words that a mobile phone user would text to the organization's short code to join their list – as it likes to encourage its audience to join its mobile program. Dedicated short codes are registered with the CSCA, which charges a $500-$1000 lease fee each month ($500 for a random short code and $1000 for a vanity code).

A shared short code is a type of common short code. Typically it is registered to a mobile vendor and shared among the vendor's clients. Although there are charges for the number of text messages sent by an organization, a shared short code often saves the organization the monthly lease fee for the code. However, organizations are limited in the number of keywords that they can set up since they share the short code with others.
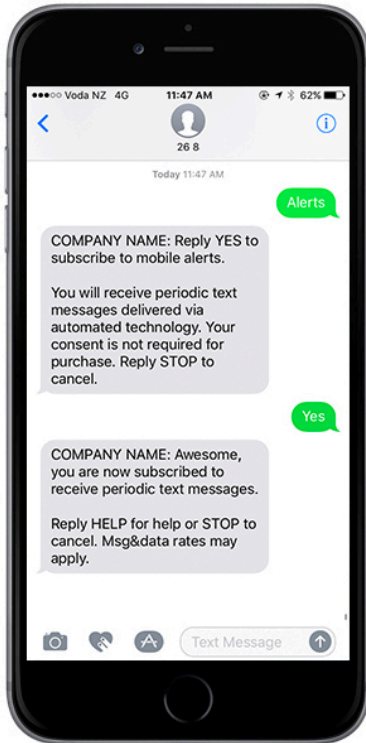

+Keyword

Refers to the word that a mobile phone user would text to the organization's short code to join its list. In the example above, **STAND** is the keyword. Keywords allow the organization to segment its list by the way or reason that someone joined the list, which language they prefer or what issue they care about.

Rules of Engagement

Organizations sending text messages to their supporters should work with a mobile vendor, such as Hustle or Textedly, in the same way that they manage their email list. However, mobile is regulated in different ways than a typical email program and understanding these differences is important:

Best Practices

1. An organization cannot just add someone to its list because the organization has the person's cell phone number.
2. Users must opt-in by either texting a keyword to the organization's short code or entering a cell phone number via a web form.
3. If user join via a website, they will receive a welcome text message asking them to confirm that they do indeed want to join.
4. The first text message must include guidance about how the person can unsubscribe from the list.

Once you've registered for a short code, use these best practices:

- Avoid long periods of down time between text messages. Subscribers may forget that they are on the list. Aim to send a text message to supporters weekly or biweekly, but no more than once a week. As with any list, monitor your unsubscribes and action rates. Reviewing these metrics will help you to determine if your supporters want more or fewer messages. Every list is unique.
- Always identify the organization or campaign in the text message. The text message likely will appear as an unknown phone number in the subscriber's inbox. Identifying the organization in the message will remind subscribers that the message is not spam.
- Make the messages interactive. Choose a vendor that allows your users to reply to messages so that they don't feel like they are receiving messages from a machine.
- Integrate a sign-up button to join the mobile program on your website or any other online channel with a sign-up form.
- Pitch your short code at events to capture the audience and ask people to join. The pitch to join should include a strong call to action instead of a simple "join us."

Ways to Use Mobile

Calls to action: Ask list subscribers to make phone calls or sign a petition in support of an issue or campaign. March For Our Lives. while campaigning for Yes on SB 43, the Background Checks Expansion Act, had supporters text to be connected to their senator's office to voice support.

News/events: Send updates or promotional announcements about upcoming events, encouraging subscribers to attend. An organization can alert its network to breaking news relevant to subscribers.

Educational messages: Trivia is a good way to spur engagement with your supporters. Send trivia questions to subscribers during down times when the list needs to receive a message and give supporters multiple-choice answers to respond.

Poll your supporters: Interactivity can be valuable for mobile programs. Send a poll to supporters asking what the most pressing need is in their communities or their opinion on a particular issue.

Collect information: Individuals can fight against injustice by providing information to an organization via mobile devices. For example, All Alert, the nation's most powerful citizen reporting system, is supported by the NAACP's network of activists dedicated to stopping hate crimes in the country.