

attentive®

SMS Marketing 101: Everything You Need to Get Started

A comprehensive guide to driving immediate
results with text message marketing



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Introduction

As e-commerce marketing becomes more and more mobile, brands are doubling down on SMS to engage their customers—and some even say it's their top channel. Personalized text messaging lets you connect with customers through real-time, one-on-one conversation.

In this e-book, we'll cover everything you need to successfully launch an SMS program—from defining SMS marketing and choosing your provider to building your SMS channel and driving meaningful results. Each chapter will include simple tips and strategies along with some quizzes to test your knowledge. If you already have an SMS program, use this as a refresher to make sure you're not missing any opportunities to get even more out of your channel.

CHAPTER 1

What is SMS Marketing and Why Should I Prioritize it Now?

- What is SMS marketing?
- Why is SMS marketing so effective?
- Why launch an SMS marketing channel now

What is SMS marketing?



SMS, which stands for short message service, refers to messages of up to 160 characters, including plain text, numbers, and emojis. MMS, or multimedia messaging service, is a type of text message that contains multimedia like video, images, audio, and GIFs. Like email, [SMS has evolved](#) into a direct marketing channel that lets [brands connect](#) with consumers in a [personalized](#) and measurable way.

Over the last few years, text messaging has become a valuable differentiator for brands of all sizes who've leveraged it to drive revenue, and build loyalty and engagement with their customers. This performance marketing channel personalizes the interactions we have with brands.

Why is SMS marketing so effective?

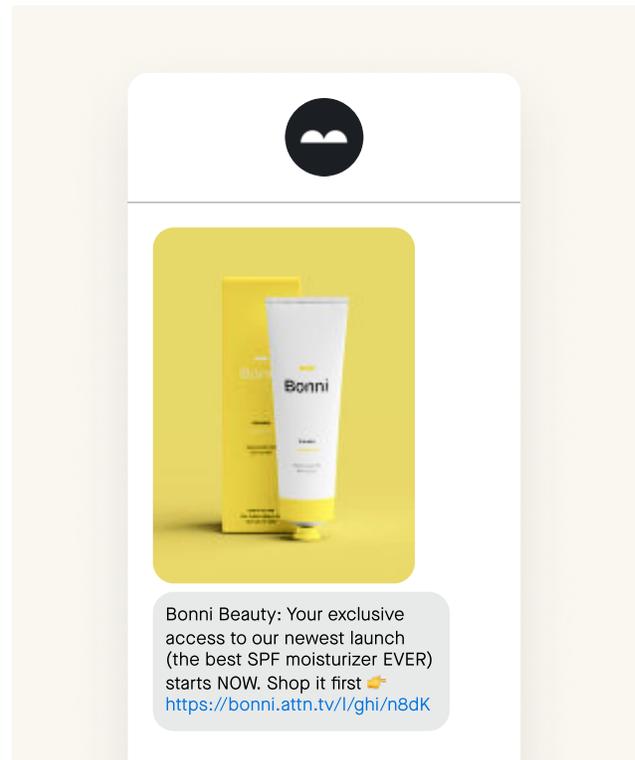
Most of us have only one cell phone number. We keep it for a long time and are pretty selective about who we share it with. We carry our phones with us everywhere for immediate and reliable communication with our friends, families, and now, brands.

Being able to [text our favorite brands](#) feels natural and convenient. And because SMS [requires consent](#) and makes it easy to opt-out, we can feel in full control of which brands are in our "favorites."

For marketers, text messaging stands out as a channel that's uniquely data-informed and measurable. Its immediacy lets you tailor your strategy in real time to drive action.

With analytics, channel orchestration, and reporting tools, you can better engage your audiences so they're receiving content and offers they're interested in.

When it's done well, SMS can power much more than the acquisition stage of your marketing efforts. It can become a central part of your CRM. Use it to have back-and-forth conversations with your shoppers—whether recommending new products they might be interested in, or answering their customer service questions.



Why launch an SMS marketing channel now

It's getting harder to reach consumers as their preferences change. They're trading traditional acquisition and retention channels for more modern and convenient brand interactions on their own time.

Email click-through rates have decreased in the last eight years, [while digital ad performance for display and social have dropped](#) over the last few years. [Recent changes with iOS 14.5 and 15 have raised new challenges](#), reducing performance.

It's clear that marketers can't rely solely on these more traditional methods to engage their shoppers. They need to diversify their channels—both from a consumer preference and marketing performance perspective.

Consumers see personalized text messaging as a way to have more direct access to brands—whether it's to get support, access sneak peeks, or stay informed about their order status. They're interested in receiving texts throughout the customer lifecycle—to source discounts before making a purchase and to stay in touch after they've clicked “buy.”

[91% of consumers are interested in signing up for texts](#), but not all brands offer it yet—meaning they're leaving money (and consumer goodwill) on the table. With the majority of consumers interested in text messaging, you have a massive chance to capture consumers' attention (and e-commerce revenue).

Quiz Time

Which of the following statements is true about text message marketing?

- A. Text message marketing is a one-way marketing channel
- B. Text messaging is only used by younger consumers
- C. Text message marketing cannot be used in tandem with email marketing
- D. Text message marketing can strengthen email marketing efforts

CHAPTER 2

How to Choose an SMS Marketing Provider

- Easy set up & launch
- Guidance on compliance
- Integrations that connect with your tech stack

Easy set-up & launch



More often than not, the key factor in a successful SMS program is a smooth rollout.

Consider how much guidance you'll receive from [your SMS partner](#), and if they offer training and learning opportunities that will help you boost your strategy (and revenue). Your provider should have resources to help you easily grow your subscriber list, send and schedule messages, create targeted segments, analyze the performance of your program, and more.

You should also prioritize an SMS marketing platform that [focuses on reliable deliverability](#). Make sure your provider has close relationships with carriers so they can quickly advise on any deliverability issues the carriers are experiencing (or any updates they're making) and provide direction on how to resolve the issues.

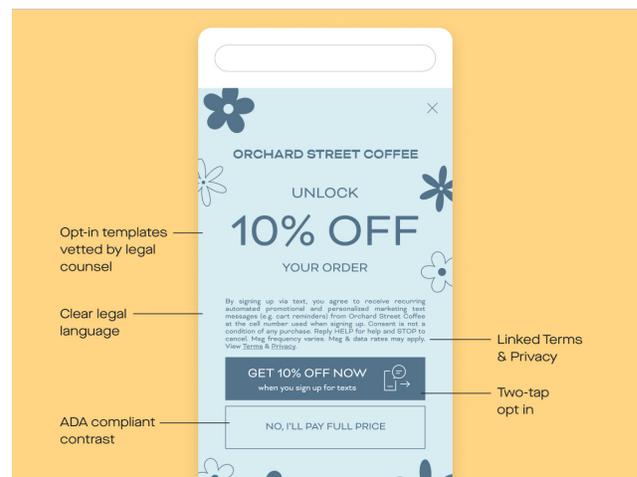
Guidance on compliance

The SMS industry is held to high compliance standards, so staying compliant with SMS regulations is crucial.

In the United States, you must be compliant with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA), and the guidelines of the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association ([CTIA](#)). If you don't comply with the guidelines, it can lead to costly results including consumer

complaints, suspension of your short code, and even lawsuits.

It may sound intimidating to keep up with all the SMS-specific regulations, but don't let it stop you from getting started with this marketing channel. The right vendor should be able to [provide you with guidance](#) to help you navigate these guidelines.



Why loyalty programs grow VIP purchasers:

- Your subscriber must explicitly opt-in for SMS marketing.
- You must explain to potential subscribers what types of messages they'll receive and clearly state how they can opt-out.
- You must respect opt-out requests.
- You can't send text messages during certain federal or state "quiet hours."

Your SMS platform should also help you determine the right phone number for your business, whether that's a dedicated 5- or 6-digit short code, a toll-free number, or an A2P 10-digit long code (10DLC). Avoid any platform that's using standard P2P 10-digit phone

numbers—known as long codes—as they’re no longer permitted for sending marketing messages, according to US cellular carriers.

Integrations that connect with your tech stack

While SMS is a top performance marketing channel on its own, it can become even more powerful when [integrated with your existing tech stack](#). The data you collect from e-commerce platforms, ESPs, CDPs, CRMs, and other technologies lets you centralize and access valuable customer details so your brand can send more relevant text messages and increase revenue.

Integrations also help amplify your SMS marketing efforts—and ensure consistency with your other marketing channels, like email—so you can deliver more personalized subscriber experiences.

Think about your brand’s other important marketing channels—such as email or your website—and how you might be able to use customer data to improve your text messaging results. Then, make sure your SMS vendor lets you easily integrate with those channels. For example, Attentive has advanced integrations with select ESP partners to allow for easy orchestration across email and SMS, in addition to other marketing technologies.

Quiz Time

In the US, SMS compliance requirements include which of the following:

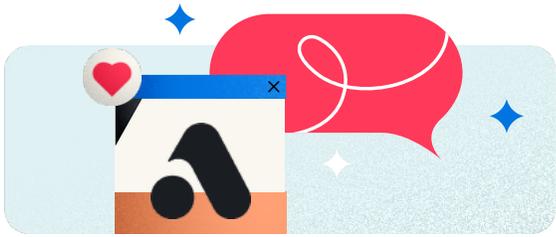
- A. Your subscriber must explicitly opt-in for SMS marketing
- B. You must explain to potential subscribers what types of messages they’ll receive and clearly state how they can opt-out
- C. You must respect opt-out requests
- D. All of the above

CHAPTER 3

Launch and build your SMS strategy

- List growth tools
- Campaign messaging
- Media options including SMS, MMS, and video
- Triggered messaging and segmentation

List growth tools

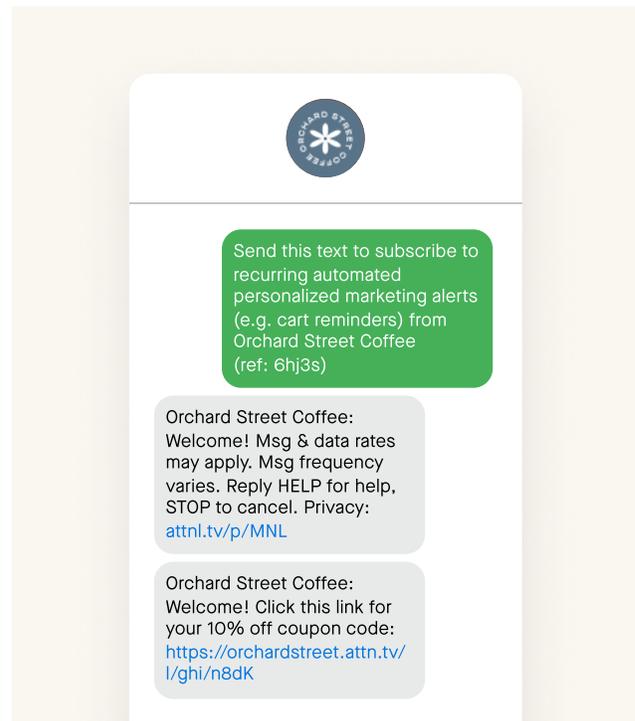


A healthy subscriber base is key to the success of your text messaging program. From converting website traffic into subscriber growth to optimizing how people join your SMS subscriber list (whether online or offline), your text message marketing partner should offer a [robust suite of list growth tools](#) and take the manual work out of opting in subscribers. Without this, you risk significantly limiting your SMS list growth rate.

At a minimum, make sure your SMS marketing platform offers the following list growth strategies. Bonus points if they also allow you to grow your list across social media, dedicated landing pages, and more.

- **Convert on-site visitors:** Engage your website visitors with a sign-up unit that's displayed across your mobile and desktop websites, and encourage them to opt-in to get text message marketing updates from your brand.
- **Scale email and SMS subscribers simultaneously:** You're likely already collecting email sign-ups on your website, so working with a partner that can easily add SMS to your existing flow is crucial for growing both lists. When evaluating SMS vendors, make sure they allow you to build your email subscriber list, too—and determine if their functionality is manual or automated.
- **Drive offline sign-ups with Text-to-Join:** In addition to driving subscriber sign-ups across

your digital channels—including email, social media, and your website—don't forget about using Text-to-Join options for in-store signage, checkout kiosks, packaging, physical mailers, outdoor advertising, business cards, receipts, event collateral, and more.



You should also make sure you have the flexibility to control [what your sign-up units look like and where/when to show them](#).

- Design high-performing sign-up units that match the look and feel of your website. Our platform's design editor lets you edit and customize your sign-up units. And the Attentive team can advise on strategies for optimizing your design for your brand's unique needs.
- Optimize your onsite experience by controlling when and where you display your sign-units. Our display rules include a Pop-Up Timer, Scroll Delay, and Exit Intent.

- If you're [driving sign-ups with an incentive](#), include the coupon code or a link with the offer automatically applied. If you're not offering a perk, link back to your best sellers or a piece of editorial content so subscribers can keep learning more about your brand. Use our auto-apply URLs, which send the subscriber to your site with the discount code already applied so that they don't need to copy and paste a code at checkout.
- Write engaging copy for your sign-up unit and welcome message—which is automatically sent after a subscriber opts-in to your text messaging program. Since SMS is a personal channel, speak to customers like people—using “you” and “we”—and infuse your brand voice into your message. And don't forget to end with a strong CTA to immediately drive traffic to your website.

Campaign Messaging

Your SMS marketing platform should allow you to [send revenue-generating one-time campaigns](#) that showcase your product, promotions, and more. You should also be able to [segment your campaign messages](#), so your text messages can be easily targeted for any marketing initiative—whether that's retention, awareness, or acquisition.

We also recommend checking for testing and optimization capabilities within your text message campaigns. You should be able to A/B test individual messages to find the copy, images, and timing that resonate most with your audience. You should also be able to see performance in real-time and use historical A/B test results to improve future messages.

Sending a campaign message 2-5 days after launching your sign-up units engages your earliest subscribers and establishes what they can expect from your channel.

Text messaging is another opportunity to engage, educate, and offer value to your shoppers. SMS doesn't just increase incremental revenue—it's a powerful channel for building brand loyalty, too.

Depending on your channel goals, you can send a promotional or non-promotional message to drive action. There's a large variety of [high-performing SMS campaigns](#) you can send, including:

- VIP content and perks
- New product launches
- Sale and limited-time offer announcements
- Invites to loyalty programs

Media options including SMS, MMS, and video

“Text” messaging is a bit of a misnomer now, as multimedia options for the channel have come a long way. Our recent SMS Marketing Consumer Trends Report found that [51.1% of consumers would be more likely to make a purchase](#) if they received a text that included a GIF, image, or video. Only 15.9% indicated they prefer plain text messages with no media.

While all platforms should have basic SMS capabilities, you'll also want to verify you can send text messages that include images, GIFs, or videos.

Your provider should also have A/B testing capabilities that let you understand how your subscribers are engaging with different types

of messages—and whether they prefer SMS or MMS—to ensure you’re sending them the content they want. Your provider’s platform should allow you to easily understand which message variation was the most effective, and why.

Triggered messaging and segmentation

Triggered messages—which are sent in response to certain customer actions—are a powerful way to engage subscribers at scale. And after welcome messages, we’ve found that abandoned cart reminders—messages sent to subscribers who’ve left their online shopping cart—are brands’ highest- converting type of triggered message.

Send subscribers a triggered message 30 to 60 minutes after they’ve left something in their online cart inviting them to complete their purchase. You can compliment their taste or create a sense of urgency by encouraging them to shop before their items are gone. Personalize your reminder with the name and image of the item to remind them of what they’ve left behind. End with a link back to their cart so they can finish checking out.

Creating the right subscriber segments for these triggered messages—and any SMS campaign—is crucial. Segmentation allows you to increase your ROI and minimize opt-outs by targeting specific groups of subscribers with messages tailored to their preferences and behaviors.

You can tailor your SMS campaigns based on:

- How often a subscriber segment wants to hear from you

- Whether a subscriber has clicked or purchased within a given period
- What types of messages a subscriber is interested in (such as limited-time offers and behind-the-scenes looks)
- A subscriber’s browse and purchase history
- A subscriber’s VIP and loyalty status
- A subscriber’s geographic location (geotargeting is especially useful for driving foot traffic)

After you’ve built segments for your most loyal subscribers, you’re ready to send personalized campaigns to capitalize on their engagement. For example, if you’re launching a new product, consider sending subscribers who have purchased a complementary item a text inviting them to shop your new product before anyone else.

Quiz Time

At a minimum, your SMS platform should make it easy to set up which of the following segments (select all that apply):

- A. Purchase history
- B. Location
- C. VIPs
- D. None of the above

Next Steps

For additional resources on how to grow your business with SMS, check out [Texts We Love](#)—our showcase of top-performing campaign messages from real brands—as well as our blog posts on [SMS Marketing FAQs](#) and choosing an [SMS marketing provider](#).

Have more questions about SMS marketing? Request a demo to [speak to one of our SMS specialists](#) and learn about our free trial for qualified brands.

Quiz Time Answer Key

D	5
D	8
A, B, C	12

About Attentive

Attentive empowers the most innovative brands to create meaningful interactions through personalized text messaging.

Attentive® is the leader in conversational commerce, reinventing business to consumer communication. Our SMS-first software platform helps everyone from entrepreneurs to enterprises strengthen relationships with their consumers in a new way. Through two-way, real-time, personalized communications, we drive billions in e-commerce revenue and over 4,500 leading brands like CB2, Pura Vida, Urban Outfitters, Jack in the Box, and Coach rely on Attentive to deliver powerful commerce experiences.

To learn how to get started with our free trial for qualified brands, request a demo to speak with one of our SMS marketing specialists.

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