



Companies should be using SMS technology (texting) to extend customer service in today's competitive marketplace. Business must adapt to the mobile lifestyles of their customers if they want to create loyalty and growth. To really satisfy their customers, companies need to build a strong personal relationship with them and understand their needs. What's more, they need to satisfy those needs within the timescale and in the manner that customers desire.

Take a prescription

You may be surprised to hear that the National Health Service is, for once, well ahead of the business world in recognising the benefits of using SMS messaging. The sending of text messages to mobile phones reminding patients of their forthcoming appointments is being used to reduce the number of 'did not attends'. The NHS says it costs £320m a year because more than one in 10 patients does not keep their appointment.

Many UK companies have failed to recognise the opportunity before them and are not using SMS to communicate with clients. This is a major omission and means they are not fitting in with their customers' lifestyles.

There may be several reasons why business has not got to grips with SMS:

- They have just not thought about it;
- they don't know what to use it for;
- they think it will be too difficult to

Go to bed with customers, on the train, or to work, the pub, even on holiday

by
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Would you encourage customers to take your staff home if it makes them happy? Some people would say that this would be going too far in the quest to deliver complete customer satisfaction, but there is nothing to stop you going anywhere they take their mobile phone.

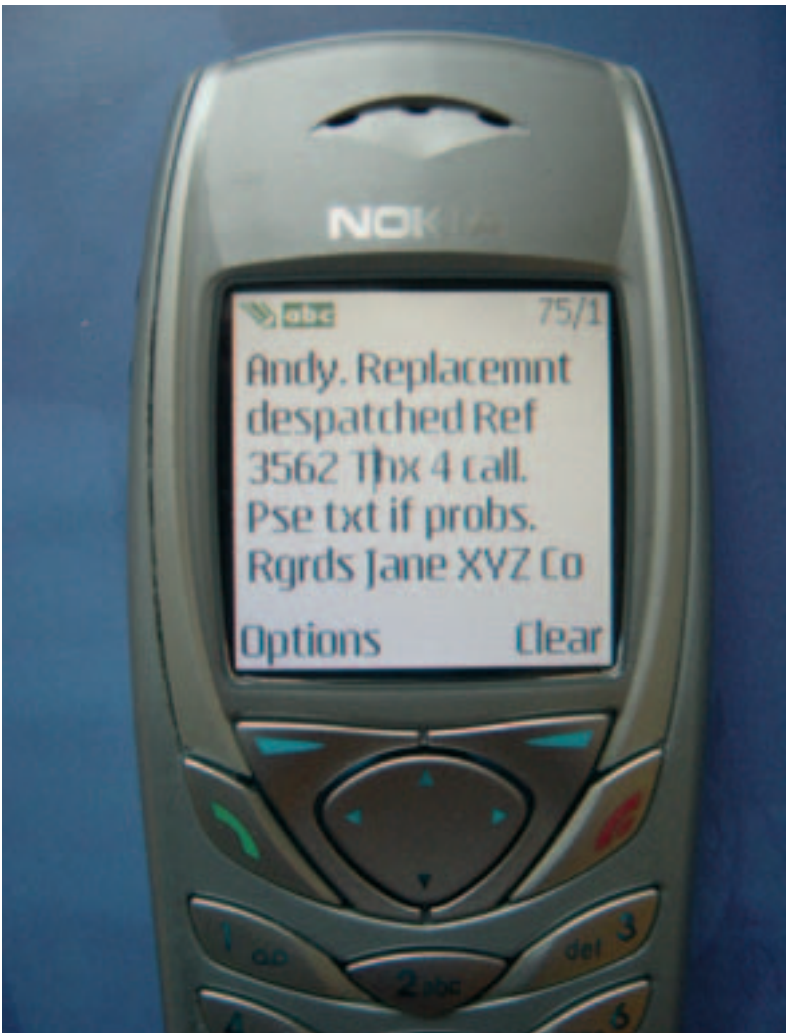
- set up;
- they think it will be too hard to administer.

With a good customer communication system (CCS), set-up and administration will present no problem. What is more important is for companies to understand why they should embrace texting and what they should use it for.

Why do it?

Almost three-quarters of UK adults have mobiles and use SMS text. This figure is significantly higher in the 15 – 35 age group. Nine out of 10 customers expect a response to a query or complaint in a day or two.

Today's consumers are busy, mobile people. The ones with the most disposable income are the most



mobile and conduct their affairs electronically on the move. From buying cosmetics, booking flights to sorting out the boiler, they do it from their mobile, PDA or laptop, so why not deliver your customer services the same way?

SMS is more immediate and much cheaper than snail mail. Not only does it cost less than a second class stamp but when you take into account the labour and materials associated with creating a mailing or letter, there is no comparison.

Did you know?

It doesn't have to be just text either. Sometimes a picture or video may be appropriate. Also, did you know that a text message can be sent to a landline and be received as a voice message? That can be very useful for anyone without a mobile, like the elderly, or for visually impaired people. Now that's real care!

Stand alone SMS

You give a list of mobile numbers to a service provider, along with a

standardised message and they send it out. Pricing is usually based on a 'text credit', plus a monthly fee. These can look quite attractive initially but often a single message can use several text credits, so beware. Not only can this work out more expensive in the long run but you have to spend time looking up the numbers and creating the send requests. Also it is a one-way process and you are not building any historical contact data.

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Integrated SMS

A customer communication system provider sets up an automated process to send messages to individuals or groups at will, or at pre-determined times programmed to suit you and the clients. The CCS instructs the SMS system as to which message to send and to whom. You don't need to do anything. In addition, you will be recording the activities and any responses.

Generate brand loyalty

The ability to communicate brand values to customers and have them make responses and comments at any time, especially when they are with friends or business colleagues, is invaluable in terms of really finding out how you are performing and getting them to recommend your brand or service. The most likely time your customers will recommend your brand to their peers is when they are out with them (obviously) but rather than relying on the customer to be motivated enough to tell them, they will see excellent service in action and form a positive impression.

What can you do with it?

Customer focussed

- Register complaint
- Request information
- Issue acknowledgements
- Progress information
- Price and availability updates
- Product recalls
- Warranty registration
- Promotions
- New product announcements
- Greetings
- Feedback requests
- Helpful hints

Internally focussed

- Information requests
- Service requests
- Information response
- Service status
- Customer issues
- Production warnings
- Company updates
- Technical instructions

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