Pharma Turns to Texting:
# A CRM Channel Growing in Popularity

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Given how much time we spend on our smartphones, more and more pharmaceutical marketers are turning to texting to communicate with patients, opening up a channel that is ripe with opportunity. In 2019, for the first time ever, US consumers will spend more time with their mobile devices than they do watching TV. Nearly every measure of texting as a channel is attractive to a marketer—from high daily usage of 3+ hours per day to high open rates nearly 5X that of email.

However, unlike email—which marketers are used to sending—a channel as personal as a text message requires a different approach. That's because you're interacting with patients on their most personal device, their mobile phone. Let's discuss a few best practices for best-in-class texting programs.

Open rate comparison

98% Texting

20% Email
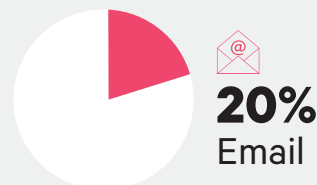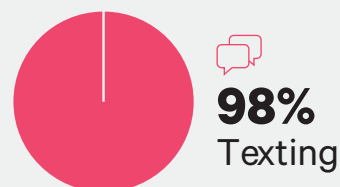
Gartner, 2016

Provide Real Value

It goes without saying that text messages are best when they provide valuable information to patients. Content that is either time sensitive or triggered is always best sent via text. Is your call center about to reach out by phone or have patients just missed a call from your call center? Sending a text can help facilitate those one-on-one interactions. Want to remind patients of an upcoming appointment? Have patients missed a refill or a copay redemption? Is there a new event or exciting update you want to make them aware of? Texting can help to intercept patients at these key moments to ensure they're staying on track with treatment and managing their disease.

K.I.S.S. and Not Too Frequent

Try and keep your texts short and sweet as patients don't want to read a long scrolling text message. The number of characters that can fit in a standard text message is 160. Text messages or SMS messages that exceed 160 characters will often be split into two or more separate messages. Remember, the more succinct, the better. Also, try not to send texts too often as patients don't want to receive an excessive number of text messages. Letting patients know at sign up how often you'll be texting them is a best practice.

Try and Avoid Making Claims or Triggering the Need for Safety

Building on keeping text messages short and sweet, if you're sending texts from a branded CRM program, consider leaving out mentions of the condition and avoid making branded claims, as doing those 2 things will likely trigger ISI or the need for select safety, which will result in making your texts too long.

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Try Not to Duplicate Information

While you may want to ensure your patients are getting every important message, try to determine which messages may be better sent via text vs email or direct mail. If patients are enrolled into a variety of communication channels, bombarding them with the same exact message at the same time across every channel comes across as spammy and may result in patients unsubscribing from one or more channels.

Think Beyond Adherence

While text programs usually accompany other CRM efforts to help patients start and stay on treatment, there may be additional opportunities to leverage texting for your up-funnel prospective patients. Given that enrollment into a texting program can be relatively quick and easy, some brands have started to test text within their DTC television spots in order to open up communication channels early on to help drive additional consideration. For tactics driving awareness and consideration, consider adding a text call to action (eg, "Ready to learn more? Text 'READY' to 555-55") in order to start engaging with patients immediately.

Don't Be Afraid to Link Out

While texting programs that are two-way (meaning they allow for users to respond to receive additional information) tend to provide a better user experience, you can still allow users to get to additional information in one-way text programs through the use of Bitly links. Added bonus: Bitly links will help to keep your text messages short.

Cross Your T's and Dot Your I's

Last, but certainly not least, all text programs should do three things:

1. **Get permission from users before sending text messages**
   - Texting is a unique channel in that marketers should obtain what is called a double opt-in before continuing to text with users. If patients are enrolling into a texting program by providing their phone number in an online registration form, the first text message they receive should drive them to reply back in order to "double" confirm (hence the double opt-in) that they're interested in receiving additional text communications.

2. **Make it easy to exit the texting program**
   - You should make it obvious for users to opt out of text messages at any time by informing them how to do so; for example, make it known early on what users must text (usually "STOP") in order to stop receiving text communications from your program.

3. **Provide all necessary disclaimers**
   - Given that some phone plans may charge users for each text message they receive (and more so the text message is sent with content such as images), it's important to inform users right off the bat that "Msg & data rates may apply."
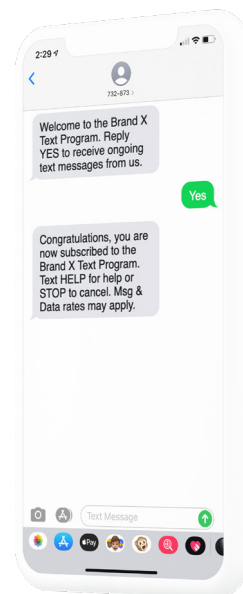
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1. "US Time Spent with Mobile 2019," Yoram Wurmser, emarketer, May 30, 2019
2. "Tap Into The Marketing Power of SMS," Chris Pemberton, Gartner, Nov 3, 2016