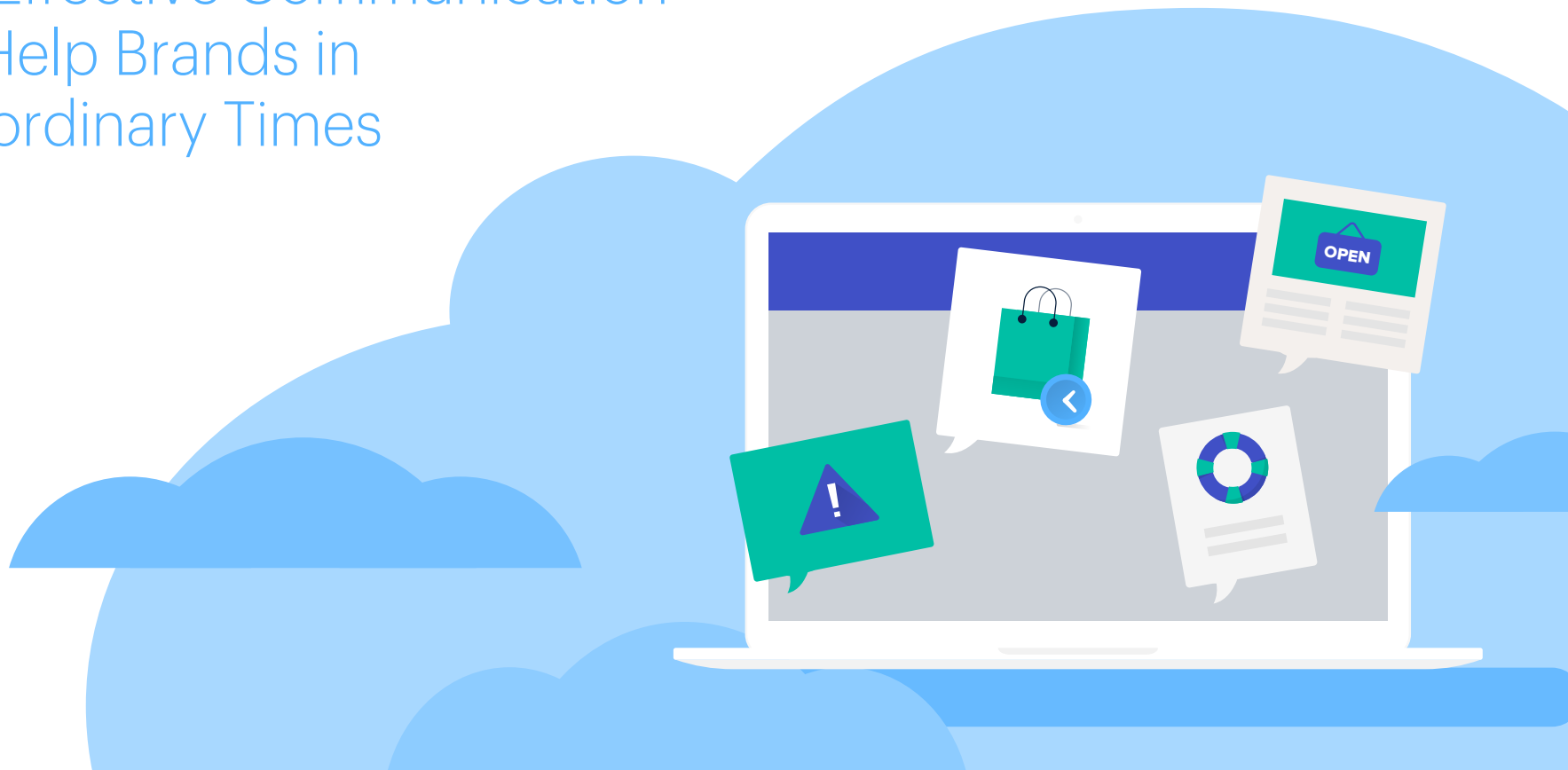# COMMUNICATING THROUGH CHANGE

How Effective Communication Can Help Brands in Extraordinary Times

Table of Contents

Medallia Zingle

Introduction

Effective communication is a critical piece of being a successful business in any environment. Amidst a global pandemic, where a series of unpredictable events loom over all industries and society as a whole, maintaining effective communication is more important than ever. And in many respects, it's harder than ever.

As businesses face enormous spikes in incoming requests from customers looking for answers and solutions, teams are experiencing massive strains on resources and bandwidth. Not to mention the fact that many of these same organizations have had to transform their operations and become leaner to sustain both the health and economic crises brought on by COVID-19.

Research has shown that customers already have high expectations when it comes to customer service and communication. A recent study we commissioned found that

60% of American consumers won't wait in line or on hold for more than 5 minutes to get an answer to a question, and 52% say they expect service issues resolved in under 15 minutes.

When expectations aren't met, 22% of respondents said they definitely would not return to the business and 55% would be less likely to. This level of impatience and the impact from it is felt across industries and it's only being exacerbated by the unprecedented strain many organizations now face.

Modern and effective communication must be fast, convenient and responsive. Before today, real-time communication was an opportunity for businesses to build deeper and longer lasting connections with customers. Now it is an imperative and the best path forward.

Brands that can effectively communicate in real-time with customers and engage in two-way conversations will not only survive these extraordinary times, but thrive in the future.

60%
of American consumers won't wait on hold for more than 5 mins to get an answer to a question.
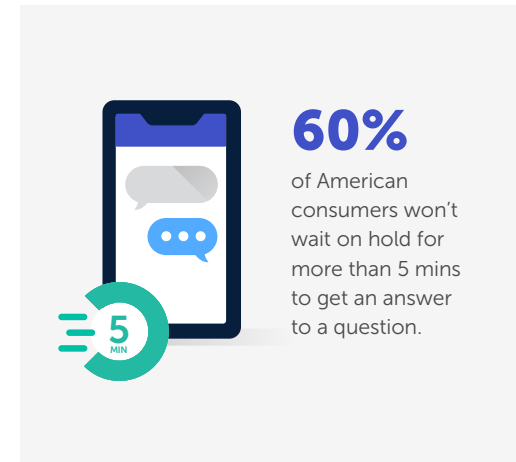
The Need for Real-Time Communication

Consumers don't have the time or desire to spend minutes for something that could be answered or resolved in seconds. Amidst a global health crisis, the need for speed, convenience and responsiveness is even more important, and ideally, without face-to-face contact.

Businesses must be ready to engage consumers on their terms. Today, that means through text messaging. It's how we communicate important updates and plans to co-workers and loved ones, it's how we stay in touch with our kids and communicate with distant friends and family. As texting has grown to become the most prevalent and personal form of communication in our private lives, it has also become the most effective way for modern businesses to communicate with customers.

More than half the homes in the U.S. no longer have a landline (U.S. Health Department), 77% of the population owns a smartphone (Pew Research) and texting, not calling, is how the majority of people use their phones to communicate today.

64%

When asked why they message businesses, over 64% of people surveyed across 4 markets say it's because they're "always messaging anyway."

Source: Facebook

50%
NO LANDLINE

77%
HAVE A SMARTPHONE

< AGE
50
PREFER TEXTING

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Businesses know they have to be available across all the channels their customers may use, but for real-time communication and two-way conversations, texting is the most effective and efficient platform. Voice calls can be tedious to make one at a time and are impersonal and ineffective when automated. Mass email is far easier to execute, but open rates that reach 20% are considered good. Social media updates are necessary, but may not be seen by customers depending on when they are posted, other trending news and the ever changing algorithms that control who sees what.

With texting having an average open rate of 98%, businesses can send personalized communications to multiple customers quickly and be assured the message is received. Texting also provides an easy way for customers to respond, using the device they've already got in their hand, no matter where they are. And with a text messaging platform, businesses can manage all customer conversations on one screen.

TEXTING
98% Open Rate

EMAIL
20% Open Rate
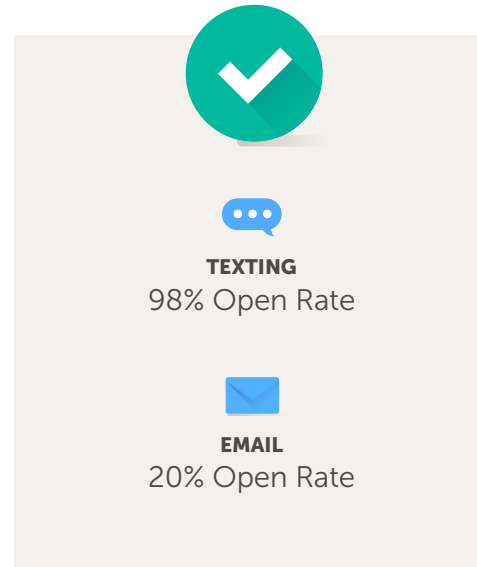
Businesses across all industries are using text messaging in some form and many are adopting more advanced technology to make it the primary way they communicate with customers at scale. Sophisticated platforms can respond automatically or escalate to the right person, send personalized one-to-many messages and be synced to other technologies to expedite service response and recovery.
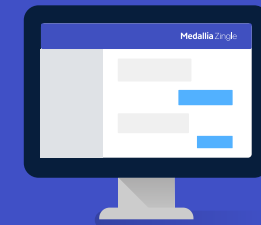
Advantages of Using a Sophisticated Texting Platform

- Automated responses
- Escalate issues to the right staff
- Send personalized messages at scale
- Integrates with existing systems
- Analytics for valuable insights
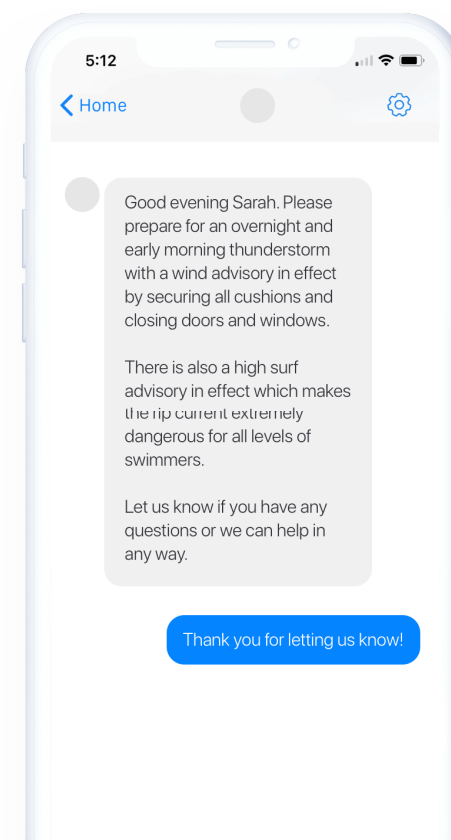
REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION

Texting helps vacation condo management warn renters about hurricanes and storm warnings.

With more than 300 managed vacation rental units throughout Perdido Key and Orange Beach Florida, Luxury Coastal Vacations always struggled to reach every guest by phone when there were severe storm warnings. They spent hours trying and rarely connected with guests, meaning the maintenance team would have to work nights visiting each property to ensure guests knew what was going on and to properly stow the patio furniture.

"We would spend so much time on phones trying to reach people and they'd never see the emails we sent," said Kenzie Carden, a marketing specialist at Luxury Coastal Vacations. "And then we'd have to send our maintenance team out and they were spending three days at condos we couldn't reach until 10 at night moving furniture. It was a really bad way to handle communication especially with the stress on top of that because of the storm."

After implementing a messaging platform, the team at LCV now sends group text messages to all in-stay guests to warn them about hurricanes or storm warnings and provide instructions, whether it be evacuation orders or to move furniture inside.

5:12

❮ Home ⚙

Good evening Sarah. Please prepare for an overnight and early morning thunderstorm with a wind advisory in effect by securing all cushions and closing doors and windows.

There is also a high surf advisory in effect which makes the rip current extremely dangerous for all levels of swimmers.

Let us know if you have any questions or we can help in any way.

Thank you for letting us know!

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Communicating Through a Crisis and Sudden Change

In an environment of rapid change and business volatility, customer communication becomes mission critical. Every industry — lodging, F&B, healthcare, retail, fitness, shipping, automotive to name just a few—has been impacted in some way by the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Many have had to close their doors because of government mandates or a sudden halt in demand, while others have quickly transformed their business to meet new needs, reduce staff or to create new safety protocols. Others, like those in healthcare and shipping, may now be responding to unprecedented surges in business.

Consumers, rightfully so, have plenty of questions, ranging from the basic, such as whether you're still open and what precautions you're taking to potentially more complicated questions about whether any of your employees may have been sick, or how they can delay or cancel orders or memberships.

Here are five keys to effectively communicating with customers during a crisis:

1 **Be Clear, Consistent & Strike the Right Tone**

Everyone has been impacted in some way by today's pandemic. In every crisis situation, it is crucial that you quickly convey what's important. When the situation is serious, err on the side of caution with lighthearted material or anything too promotional. Review and pause or update any marketing that no longer is relevant or could come across as tone deaf.

Make sure your customers know you care and that you understand they are also facing new challenges. They may be worried and pressed for time, so any communication that misses the mark has the potential to cause long-term damage to the relationship with your brand. Provide the information they need and have empathy.

All customer-facing employees directly interacting with or responding to customers — online, in person, by phone, email or text message — should be provided as much training and messaging as possible to ensure clear, consistent and compassionate communication across all channels. Providing employees with talk tracks and editable messaging templates can be helpful in two ways: They provide clear direction to respond in a consistent manner across your brand and employees can respond to more customers quicker.

Save time and stay on brand with templated replies.
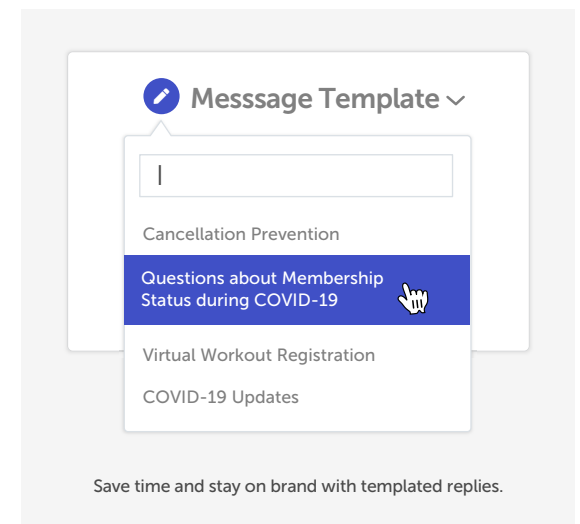
2 Be Proactive

No matter the question, you have to be ready to respond. But the ultimate goal should be to anticipate your customers' needs before they ask and alleviate their concerns with proactive communication. Make sure you've updated messaging on your website and all recorded or automated phone, email and text messaging communications with how your business has adapted so customers can easily and consistently find the information they need. Proactively send them the most important information that may affect them — your new hours, policies, safety protocols, important reminders or how they can place an order — on the channel you know they are most likely to see and respond to with questions or concerns.

3 Inform, Don't Overwhelm

Provide customers with the information they need, but don't over do it. If 50 words will do, don't send 500. Update the crucial information on your website and all your external channels and make sure you reach urgently affected customers.

Email is best used for broader announcements to a wide audience. This channel is ideal for information that isn't urgent and a great place to provide a link to an FAQ page and a text number encouraging opt-in for those with questions.

Social media channels are also good places to post wider announcements and notifications on where to read in-depth information and FAQs, but be aware that algorithms may limit which messages are seen by customers.

Texting is the best channel for timely outreach and the most effective way to reach the right customer with the right information at the right time. Using a text messaging platform can help open an efficient channel for two-way conversation and personalized service in a way that's more sustainable than managing an influx of phone calls.

Help your customers know how to text you with questions, orders or service issues by posting your text number on your website's FAQ page, social media bios and in emails.

78%

of US consumers say receiving a text message is the fastest way to reach them for important service updates.

Source: Transactional Messaging Consumer Report

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4 Manage Expectations & Be Honest

Consumers understand things are rapidly changing and they don't expect every business to have every answer. Be as honest as you can with your customers and they will be more likely to understand. If you're unsure of when — or even if — business will return to normal, don't say otherwise. If you know your response, delivery or services may take longer than normal, be up front about that and let your customers know rather than mislead them and miss the mark later.
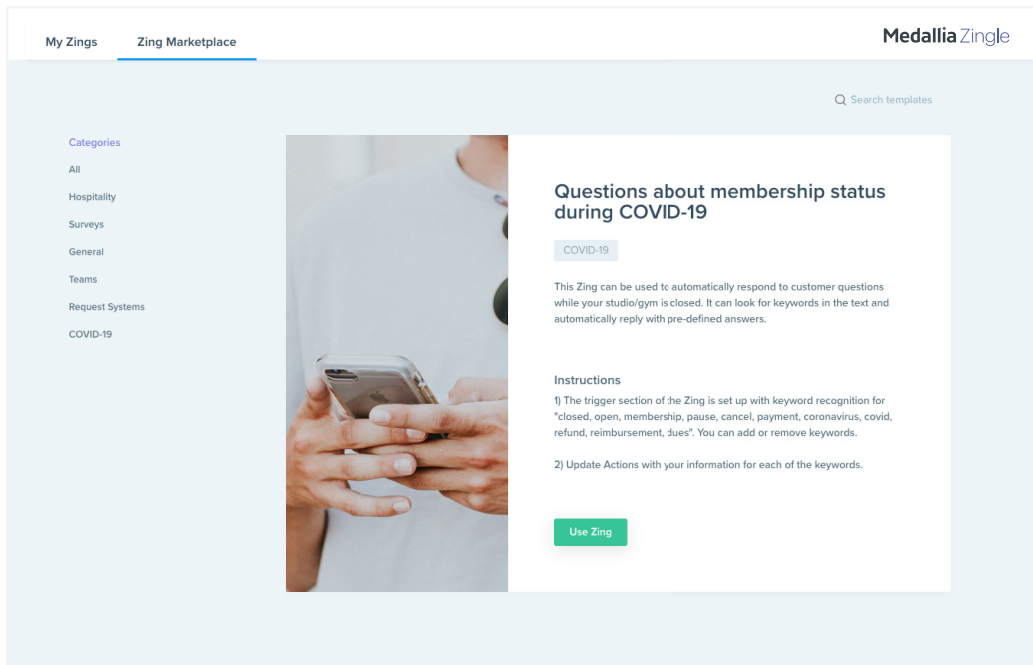
Messaging platforms can make pre-built workflows easy to deploy, automating messages and actions.

5 Respond Quickly & Be Available

Despite staffing challenges and limited resources, it is crucial that brands are available to hear from and respond to customers. Modern technology options help even skeleton crews manage customer conversations and expedite response. For example, with pre-built automated workflows, businesses using modern messaging platforms can automate relevant message responses and trigger actions that improve customer service.

Employ an easy to use technology that keeps conversations on record so issues don't fall through the cracks. The last thing anyone wants in times of crisis is to navigate a voice-automated phone tree or off-the-mark responses from a chat bot.

The more comfort and clarity you can provide customers, the better for your business today — and into the future.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH SUDDEN CHANGE

Versatility of messaging helps restaurant business adapt quickly.

With government mandated closings, quarantines and social distancing during the COVID-19 global pandemic, many businesses have been forced to close or adapt. Rather than close, restaurants, bars, delis and all sorts of retail businesses have shifted their models on the fly. They've developed processes to allow orders, payment and curbside pickup through their websites, phones, text messaging and good old-fashioned hustle.

At Beyond Bagels & Deli in Long Island, owner Dr. Robert Kleinwaks had already been using messaging to take orders for pickup and delivery, but he recently launched a curbside pickup option that has helped keep his business stay afloat during the pandemic.

On his website and in marketing, he invites customers to text their order in for pickup or delivery and customers can use their credit cards to pay by text. Customers opting for regular pickup can skip the line at the store and head to a separate area under a Zingle sign for a fast, seamless and socially distant pickup experience. And with the curbside option, customers can avoid all human contact and pick up their bagged orders of fresh bagels on an outdoor patio table in front of his store.

"We've never done curbside pickup before this, but I knew a lot of people were scared to come into stores now," says Kleinwaks, noting his wife's phobia about just that. "So I wanted to try and solve that problem and I'd say it now accounts for 10%-15% of our business, but those are people we weren't getting before."

As you may be aware of, BEYOND BAGELS is now doing CURBSIDE SERVICE, DOORDASH, GRUB HUB, REGULAR DELIVERY and PICK UP, during our new temporary hours of 6am-4pm Monday- Sunday.

We are doing everything possible to keep you safe while you eat with us, which includes, wearing masks, changing gloves, wiping services regularly and keeping 6ft from customers and each other. NONE of our employees are sick and have been instructed to go immediately and see a doctor or get tested if they show any symptoms or signs of sickness.

We appreciate your business and look forward to getting through this together.

Sincerely
Robert Kleinwaks, Owner

1h

Order for pick up
One plain bagel with cream cheese
2 iced small coffees with French Vanilla
One donut

3m

Order #5601
You won't be hungry for much longer. Your order should be ready in about 20-30 minutes. Thank you, BB
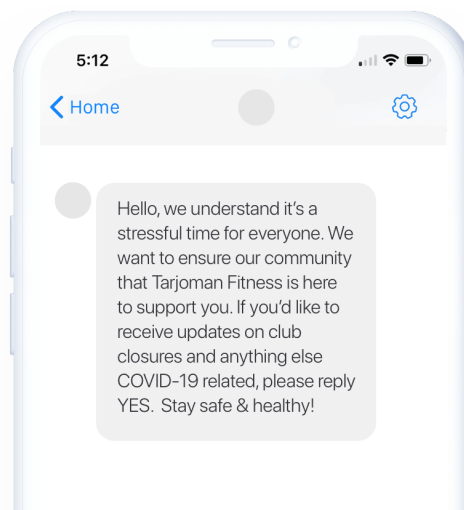
1m

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Staying Connected Through the New Customer Journey

The brands that best communicate and serve their customers during these challenging times will develop deeper relationships with them and learn valuable lessons. The COVID-19 global pandemic has illustrated the importance of real-time communication and moving forward consumers will expect this level of engagement.

Communication is more important than ever, but it is no longer enough. The customer journey has become interactive and requires two-way conversation. Businesses will have to engage and respond in real-time over the coming months to keep customers informed, engaged and ultimately, loyal, and this will become the standard long into the future.

Brands should take proactive steps now to encourage customers to respond and then develop ways to keep them engaged across the entirety of their experience.

By inviting customers to opt in to your mobile communications from the start, businesses can gain access to their preferred channel and provide the type of communication consumers crave. A recent study revealed 62% of consumers said they want to engage businesses through text messaging and 85% said they'd take advantage of special offers texted to them if relevant. By using in-store signage, window decals, digital marketing and social channels, businesses can let customers know about their mobile communications. And at the time of the transaction, online or in person, businesses should invite customers to sign up for important text updates and offers.

5:12

‹ Home ⚙

Hello, we understand it's a stressful time for everyone. We want to ensure our community that Tarjoman Fitness is here to support you. If you'd like to receive updates on club closures and anything else COVID-19 related, please reply YES. Stay safe & healthy!

62%

of consumers said they want to engage businesses through text messaging.

85%

said they'd take advantage of special offers texted to them if relevant.

Source: Medallia Zingle, 2020 Research on ROI of Customer Experience

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After customers have opted in, a quick text should be sent to confirm their opt-in and let them know when and what your business will be texting and that they can always message you with questions or to opt out at any point. From there, the conversation has begun.

For example, if you know your customers are coming to your business, you can send them a pre-arrival message — a tactic extremely effective in hospitality. Hotels and resorts often send messages reminding guests of check-in times and asking if they have any special needs or requests. After arrival, another message can be sent when guests have checked into their room to make sure everything meets their expectations and to remind them to use texting if they have any questions or requests throughout the stay. Many hotels send a checkout reminder at the conclusion of the stay, inviting guests to check out by text or even to take advantage of a special offer to extend their stay by hours or a day when the hotel has capacity.

A similar approach can be taken in other verticals. Health and fitness studios and gyms use texting to remind members about upcoming classes and appointments, to check in if they haven't seen them in a while,

or to nurture and encourage prospects to join. Law firms send clients messages with case reminders, directions to court and requests for information.

Breweries and restaurants engage customers with updates on business hours, upcoming events, specials and even in-store messages with personalized offers and surveys.

This type of communication will be crucial when businesses with a physical presence resume operations and want to do so in a way that keeps their employees and customers as safe as possible.

Stay Connected to Customers With:

- 📅 Reminder Texts
- 💬 Messages of Encouragement
- 📋 Updates (hours, specials, etc.)
- 👤 Personalized Offers
- ℹ️ Crucial Information

7.5x

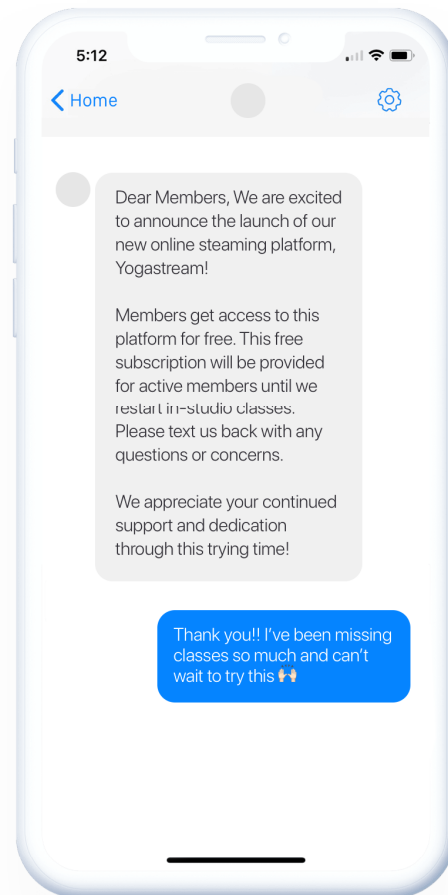Response rates to SMS marketing are 7.5x higher than email.

Source: Marketing Profs

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When crises or other circumstances cause sudden disruption to business operations, open channels for one-to-one communication can facilitate that change, quickly. The brands already engaging a large part of their customer base in text conversations will find adapting and informing far easier.

During the COVID-19 crisis, many businesses that pivoted to new models, like restaurants and retail stores shifting to curbside pickup, were successful because they were able to proactively inform their customer base of new safety standards and operating procedures. Other businesses shifted from in-person workouts, meetings and consultations to virtual versions and similarly used text messaging to inform and invite customers to the new format.

By proactively engaging customers with text communications and having interactive conversations, businesses can handle rapidly changing circumstances. But longer term, the benefits are immeasurable: Brands will better anticipate needs, identify issues before they become problems and ultimately guide customers to better experiences that lead to increased spend and return visits.

5:12

❮ Home ⚙

Dear Members, We are excited to announce the launch of our new online steaming platform, Yogastream!

Members get access to this platform for free. This free subscription will be provided for active members until we restart in-studio classes. Please text us back with any questions or concerns.

We appreciate your continued support and dedication through this trying time!

Thank you!! I've been missing classes so much and can't wait to try this 🙌

"By proactively engaging customers with text communications and having interactive conversations, businesses can handle rapidly changing circumstances."

STAYING CONNECTED

Weight Watchers builds deeper connections with members.

With increased competition in the way of fitness tracking apps, smaller clubs, larger franchises and even the broader community that social media can be, Heather Avila, chief operating officer of Weight Watchers Las Vegas, was looking for a new way to engage members. Membership had declined and it was becoming harder to reach members through phone calls and emails.

An ad agency suggested sending out weekly motivational text messages, which was an effective first step, but Avila wanted to do more and deployed a robust text messaging platform. WW started sending meeting reminder notifications to each member and answering questions and offering support via text.

With the customer support team headquartered in Las Vegas and members spread across Nevada and Utah, Avila said it was hard to have natural conversations with members on a daily basis over the phone like they do now with texting. Members can

text to say they are struggling or to celebrate a milestone.

"People don't want to call into a phone number and sit through a dial prompt and wait for someone to pick up to say, 'Hey, I just lost two pounds,'" Avila said. "It's developing that deeper relationship with our members so they can be more loyal to our brand and find more success with us because they know we're there for them."

> **"I could have never imagined what messaging was capable of and the relationships that could be built with it."**
>
> - Heather Avila, Chief Operating Officer

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Managing Communications with Limited Resources

As the importance of fast, personal and responsive communication has grown in recent years to meet changing consumer preferences, so has the pressure on businesses to "do more with less." Rising labor costs and new technologies have already increased expectations from boardrooms and owners, but now there is little choice as a result of the ongoing health crisis. Businesses are adapting on the fly to meet new needs today and in many cases with significantly reduced staff.

Executing a communication strategy through texting is not as simple as giving customers a mobile phone number and telling them to start texting you. But

intelligent messaging platforms can make it incredibly efficient for small teams and even possible for an individual to manage proactive and personal outreach and response at scale across a business.

With a single team inbox, one or more people can monitor and manage dozens of customer conversations at once with a consolidated view of all SMS and MMS texts along with messages from web chat and social apps like Facebook Messenger. Message templates can be created ahead of time and responses automated to answer common questions without any human support, freeing up staff to spend their time on the most important issues.

Intelligent messaging platforms can consolidate messages from social and web channels into one single team inbox.

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By integrating texting software with a business' core systems, like management and service optimization solutions, messages can be routed to the right teams, actions triggered automatically and workflows optimized.

Texting platforms make it easy to respond quickly, but also to proactively send personal 1:1 messages at scale. By integrating with a CRM or uploading an opt-in customer database, messages can be personalized and sent directly to different segments of your customer base, in a matter of moments. With more sophisticated platforms, relevant messages can be sent automatically to multiple contacts at once when triggered by predetermined criteria.

Managing customer communication across an entire business can be a daunting task, especially in rapidly changing times, but with the right strategy and technology it can be done by a focused team, or even a single person.

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COMMUNICATING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Non-profit uses messaging to increase efficiency & serve more customers.

Non-Profits are a labor of love, and wearing multiple hats is not uncommon for staff. As the team at Human-I-T sought to serve more households it became critical that they identify and solve inefficiencies along the application process for low-cost internet programs. Human-I-T deployed an intelligent messaging platform to engage in real-time text conversations and streamline a once complicated process. By improving the experience for their customers, the lean team of four is now able to connect new households much faster, without adding more staff.

By leveraging the messaging platform and using audience segmentation, automated messages and pre-configured messaging templates, the organization is able to transform inquiries and service needs that can require a 45-minute phone call into 2-minute text conversations. In turn, this allows Human-I-T to process more

applications for internet access, requests for computers and devices, and service more inquiries in a streamlined way.

"Before, we were able to connect 700 households to low-cost internet," says AJ Middleton, Senior Program Manager at Human-I-T. "After adopting (a messaging platform), we increased the households connected to 1700 in 2018, and in 2019, that number reached 2700 households."

BEFORE ZINGLE
45 Minute Phone Call

AFTER ZINGLE
2 Minute Text

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Balancing High-Tech with High-Touch

The value consumers place on communication that conveys a human touch can't be overstated, especially in times of crisis, and it also can't be facilitated by technology alone.

The most successful brands do more than sell products and services to their customers. They develop relationships with them through effective communication and by providing real value. These relationships embody many of the same characteristics and emotions that our relationships with people have. Take the psychology behind service recovery for example; 87% of consumers say they feel more emotionally connected to a company when it solves a problem for them.

The challenges of today may not be considered "service issues," but there's little doubt that the brands able to effectively communicate clearly with customers through these uncertain times will build deeper and longer-term relationships.

Ineffective communication — like blanket announcements with no way to reply or chatbots that aren't able to accurately respond or escalate a conversation to a human — runs the risk of turning away consumers who feel increasingly demoralized when they can't get in touch.

Customers desire communication that accounts for their individuality and strikes at the psychological drivers that we all share. They don't want to be talked at, they want to be talked with. They are desperate for businesses to listen and respond.

The right technology must make personalized conversations easier. It should identify opportunities that need the human touch, help facilitate it and automate tedious tasks so employees actually have time to provide it.

So while technology can be a powerful piece of a brand's overall communications strategy, it's important for organizations to remember that superhuman communication requires a mix of both human and machine.

87%

of consumers say they feel more emotionally connected to a company when it solves a problem for them.

Source: Zingle Guest Service Report

Medallia *Zingle*

HIGH-TOUCH WITH HIGH-TECH IN ACTION

## Technology helps resort provide a caring and personal touch.

On the last night of a stay at Nashville KOA, a massive resort, campground and RV park, a guest texted that she wanted to extend her stay by a night because her husband was sick. The GM, Aaron Williamson, happened to see the text come into his messaging inbox and instead of texting back or letting his staff handle it, he called the woman to ask how her husband was and to let her know the reservation was extended.

A little bit later, he texted her to see how things were and to share where the nearest medical facilities were just in case. A couple days later, Williamson saw a review that called out the exceptional service.

"She said no matter where else she travels in the world, she wants to come back to Nashville and stay with us because we care," said Williamson. "I'm glad guests are contacting me when there are issues

because it enables me to make it right and improve their experience."

Most guest-facing staff members at Nashville KOA monitor the messaging inbox on a daily basis, including Williamson, the operations manager, the front-desk supervisor and all front-desk agents. There are at least four to five people monitoring it at all times and Williamson expects guests to receive a response within 60 seconds.


Exceptional Service
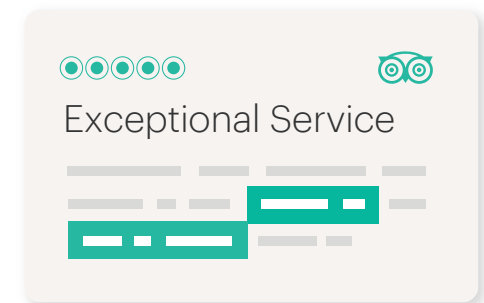
Conclusion

When brands establish two-way conversations with their customers, it opens doors that allow them to identify what their business is doing well, what they could be doing better, and how they can turn everyday customers into long-term brand advocates.

However, developing these lines is easier said than done. A recent study found that only one in four individuals will report any issue that impacts their customer experience. Even in the best of times, issues slip through the cracks when customers don't feel like there's an easy and convenient way to communicate.

That same study found that nearly half (45%) of consumers say they'd prefer to report issues through text messaging over in-person or phone, and the more recent

study cited earlier indicated that 62% of customers said they'd communicate more with a business if texting was an option. Customers don't have time to spend minutes waiting for something that could be answered or resolved in seconds. They want real-time communication and crave immediate responses.

Facing a global pandemic and economic uncertainty, your customers have more urgent questions and needs than ever before. If there was ever a time to have the proper strategy in place that leveraged your customers preferred method of communication, allowed you to safeguard the experiences they are having, and accounted for all of the new challenges your organization and teams are facing, that time is now.

62%
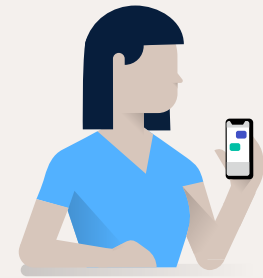
of customers said they'd communicate more with a business if texting was an option.

Source: Medallia Zingle, 2020 Research on ROI of Customer Experience

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Explore More Communication Resources

- New Consumer Research on the ROI of Customer Experience

- New Study: Customer Service in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

- The Psychology of Service Recovery

- Proactive Service Recovery, the Revenue Strategy You Can't Ignore

- 2019 Guest Service Report

- Luxury Coastal Vacations Uses Messaging to Give Guests a Personal Touch

- Text-Thru is the New Drive-Thru as Curbside Commerce Takes Off

- Weight Watchers Las Vegas Improves Member Retention with Text Messaging

- Human-I-T Can Make a Difference

- Nashville KOA Boosts NPS Scores and Positive Reviews with Real-time Messaging

Medallia Zingle

About Medallia Zingle

Medallia Zingle empowers businesses to engage, support and respond to customers in more meaningful and impactful ways. Zingle's customer engagement platform combines artificial intelligence and machine learning with workflow automation and mobile messaging, allowing brands to easily deliver exceptional customer experiences in real time. Leading brands across different verticals, including hospitality, food & beverage, retail, and more, use Zingle to increase efficiency, improve operations and delight their customers. Find out more at zingle.com.

Contact   Email: sales@zingleme.com   Call: 877.946.4536   Text: 858.877.9200

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