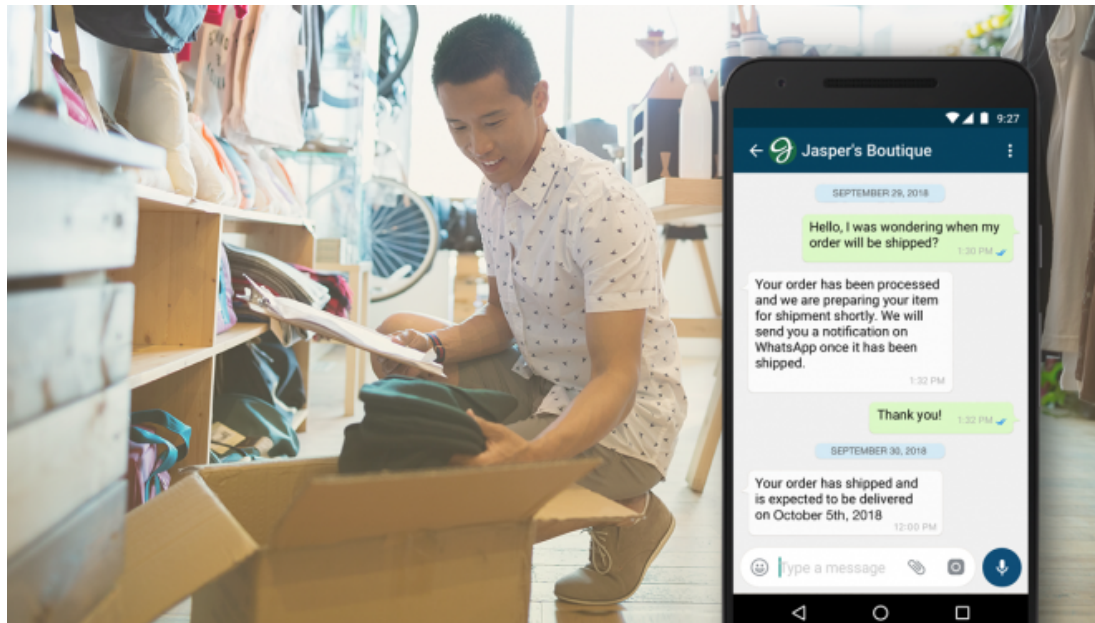


What a Smart Customer Messaging Strategy Will Look Like in 2019 and Beyond



By SHERI ATIENZA

Despite the growth of instant messaging and other OTT communication channels, SMS isn't going anywhere any time soon. Rather than asking "what comes after SMS," businesses should be asking "how can we use SMS in conjunction with other channels?"



SMS as a medium has benefits that no other channel can touch. It's accessible to nearly everybody—with or without a smartphone—and even in areas with low or no internet connectivity. And people read their text messages: SMS has open rates as high as 98%, an astounding number. Other messaging channels have their place, but SMS is still a core method of business communication in 2018 and beyond.

Business Challenges and Perceptions of SMS

Although SMS can't be touched in terms of accessibility, the high cost of SMS may lead many to accept the misconception that it is a need-based communication channel that doesn't offer great ROI. The thinking goes: yes, it's an effective way to get your customers' immediate attention, but relying solely on SMS can get expensive.

Evaluating SMS messaging primarily on its high cost of operation is failing to see the big picture though. Going into 2019, smart businesses will begin seeing SMS as more than just a one-way communication pipeline, realizing it offers a conversion channel with a true ROI. It can be used to engage and convert, and smart companies know this and will take full advantage of SMS in the coming years.

In fact, a forward-looking messaging strategy includes SMS alongside other messaging apps and communication channels. One of the primary tenets of a smart customer messaging strategy in 2019 and beyond is the recognition that today's consumer expects convenience and contextual communication carried out on the channels of their choice. For some, this will certainly be SMS. Others might prefer Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or depending on where in the world they reside something else entirely, and a smart, forward-thinking company will be prepared to utilize all of these channels.

The Customer Experience of Modern Messaging

At the root of customer messaging is the idea of the customer experience (CX), and the acknowledgment of customers as individuals rather than simply segments. A great CX puts the customer at its center and customizes itself to each customer's needs and preferences.

This means a smart messaging strategy is diversified; your company uses multiple communications channels, customized both to the business needs and to the individual user. But don't fall into the trap of one-size-fits-all messaging. CPaaS technology, which delivers messaging capabilities through APIs, puts a lot of power in the hands of brands to leverage messaging features, and this includes the power to customize each message to its medium, making every customer feel equally seen and catered to, regardless of his or her preferred channel. Beyond just "are my messages being received," companies can now consider *how* their messages are being received, taking the richness and engagement of the total messaging experience into account and addressing individual customer needs.

A Holistic View of Messaging Cost

Companies prepared for the changing landscape will take a holistic view of messaging, thinking beyond the myth of "it's just a cost, not an investment." Messaging APIs allow more granular control of the customer messaging experience than ever before.

Messaging APIs allow brands to think in terms of conversion per message, taking into consideration not only total messaging cost but also returns—both monetary and in the form of customer happiness and loyalty.

Additionally, a good API provider opens up a world of data not previously available, such as delivery and read receipts. This allows for brands to evaluate and measure messaging channels. Optimization is also key in improving the effectiveness of messaging in the various business use cases so brands are constantly iterating to improve the customer experience.

Execution of a Smart Messaging Strategy

It will be necessary to think through each messaging channel preferred by your customers and customize your message by channel, taking into account the limitations and capabilities of each; one message may not (and probably will not) work for all channels.

If you want to offer customer service or alerts using SMS, you need to think about the limitations that channel presents. SMS is text-only, so this channel rules out the use of images and QR codes in your messages.

If, for example, an airline alerts a customer via SMS that their seat has been upgraded, the airline has to provide a link to the updated boarding pass. But via an OTT app like Facebook Messenger, they can automatically provide the updated boarding pass with the new QR code.

In 2019 and beyond, a smart customer messaging strategy will be diversified across multiple channels and always cognizant of the perks and limitations of each channel. A good communications API provider can make this not just possible but easy for savvy businesses.

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