

The Joy of Text.

10 SMS Marketing Tips for Successful Private Hire Companies

Text message marketing can be a great way to reach your customers instantly, and with near-100% open rates it can be a viable marketing tool if used correctly.

The power of SMS has been well-established for over 25 years; we use it in our daily lives for both business and personal communications and as our mobiles are invariably switched on it makes us reachable almost any time. According to The Open University research the average person in the UK sends 170 text messages per month and taxi firms can harness this powerful marketing tool to bring in more bookings – here are 10 tips to show you how.

1. A Compelling Message

One of the strengths of SMS is it can illicit an immediate response, especially when worded correctly and with a clear Call To Action (CTA) such as a phone number. The key here is to make an offer and keep it specific. Although SMS is less interruptive than a phone call, if you are to contact someone you had better have a good reason to do so, making sure you provide an offer, be it a discount code or loyalty offer such as ‘take 4 journeys and get your fifth free’ - you should offer something valuable and compelling. An attention grabbing first line is usually a good start and don’t forget to make sure you always say who you are.

2. Season Campaigns with a Pinch of SMS

When a campaign is relevant it forges a bond between you and your customer. Recognise a seasonal event, national day, Bank Holiday or religious festival when people are likely to visit family and friends and you are sure to get a higher response rate. To generate even more phone bookings you could link messages to a major sporting or cultural event in your town or city.

3. Keep It Fresh

Try to send a mix of messages over time. Avoid sending the same message repeatedly – even if the offer remains the same this can quickly cause ‘subscriber fatigue’. Make recipients feel glad to be part of your ‘special text programme’. A great way to maintain consistency is to create a specific deal or promo schedule and stick to it.

4. Keep It Short

Or more accurately, keep to the point. You have 160 characters per SMS to get your message across (although it is possible to send multiple and longer messages if you pay extra for the privilege), so make each one count.

5. Get Permission

Remember to ensure you have the recipient's permission and provide them the option to opt out.

Tell them what kinds of messages they can expect from you, how often and that their mobile phone number will never be shared with anyone else. Consumers appreciate transparency so if you can achieve this you have more chance of them accepting your marketing messages.

6. Be Intelligent With Data

The big one. If you have the ability to access your customers' purchase data you will be able to gain a deeper understanding of their priorities and behaviour and, therefore, what is most likely to trigger similar purchases in the future. Imagine a scenario in which Mrs Smith, a loyal customer, does her weekly shop and books a taxi home from her local supermarket every Tuesday afternoon. You may wish to reward Mrs Smith with a special offer - and send her an appropriate SMS message on Tuesday morning - to encourage her ongoing purchases.

The same principle can apply to numerous other profiles of customers based on your knowledge of how often they book, when and their total value.

The aim here is to focus your marketing on your best customers.

7. Personalise When You Can

Think of the number times you have received marketing emails addressed to 'Hi There' and just hit 'delete'. As a private hire taxi company your booking system will probably be replete with mobile phone number data. The one thing that may well be missing however is the customer's name. With a name - or at least a first name - you have the ability to personalise your messages.

8. Timing Is Key

Never spam, don't make them too frequent or send at anti-social times of the day. A good SMS marketing service will be able to give you stats on how your texts are being read and responded to. There is a lot of market research on the subject of optimal times of day and days of the week to send various kinds of marketing, but the simple rule is to send them when passengers are most likely to want a taxi (or shortly before).

A great example is Marks & Spencer's use of SMS marketing to promote its *Dine-In-For-Two-For-£10* offer, sending their texts on Fridays around the time busy commuters are leaving work.

9. Integrate Your Marketing

Link your SMS to any online or offline campaigns you may be running. And give customers the opportunity to opt in to receiving SMS from you on your website or social media.

10. Keep Track and Learn

SMS is a relatively cost-effective medium to use as part of a wider mix of communications in terms of cost-per-contact, and can be made even more successful if you measure and learn from your campaigns. By doing so you will be able to know what areas are working well and should be repeated, and what may be improved or even stopped.

Areas to measure include: your **list growth**, **churn rate** (the opposite of list growth), **take-up** or percentage of messages that have been redeemed, clicked or have generated a phone call, and finally, **cost per redemption** which is calculated if you simply divide the total cost of all SMS sent per campaign by the number of redemptions which will tell you exactly how much you are paying for each redeeming customer.

You might not create the perfect SMS campaign straight away but these 10 tips will definitely help you optimise your campaigns over time!

If you would like to learn more about Autocab's SMS marketing services, request a demonstration at sales@autocab.com.