

A Gr8 Way 2 Win Customers

Get into your customers' pockets with SMS advertising.

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Fifty-six million American adults are texting on their cell phones, according to a month-long field survey conducted in June 2006 by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. And advertisers are getting in the game.

You have probably seen text-to-win or text-to-vote contests on TV. Popular shows like *American Idol*, *The Apprentice* and *Deal or No Deal* have persuaded millions of cell phone users to text in. You, too, can promote an SMS contest through your marketing channels, but this isn't your only option. In addition to getting consumers to text you, you can text them.

Mobile-marketing companies such as Cellit, MobileStorm and Movo can help you create an opt-in mobile marketing database. You'll tap into your existing offline and online marketing channels to invite consumers to sign up (for example: text JOIN to 12345). Using their cell phones, consumers will type in a keyword (which customers select) followed by a common short code, which is a special phone number. Or consumers can subscribe on a website and receive an opt-in confirmation request via their phones. Once customers respond, they've opted in.

Now you can send alerts, coupons, notifications and even photos or videos. You can invite opt-in consumers to participate in polls, surveys and contests. Marketing via SMS is more affordable than you might think. Costs start at \$100 to \$500 per month, which covers a specific number of messages. The per-message rate is typically 5 cents to 10 cents; you'll get a better deal if you send out more messages. Ask vendors how they charge for hosting/licensing, setup, keywords and customer support--these could be separate fees.

Here are additional questions to ask vendors: Which phone carriers do you work with? Do you comply with the Mobile Marketing Association and each carrier's best practices guidelines? Can consumers opt out by phone? What kinds of reporting do you provide?

Two-way communication can make SMS an effective research, sales and community-building channel. This form of mobile marketing is quickly attracting new advertisers. Will you join in?