

# High-Text Service



BY CHRIS LEEDOM



## The Efficiency and Timeliness of Text Messaging Can Boost the Productivity – and Profitability – of Your Service Department

**T**here's no question – the communication cycle and interaction with a dealership's customers is always important.

And it's especially important in the service department.

Customers want ease of use and convenience in everything from appointment scheduling to repair approval, all the way to ultimately knowing when their service job is complete and they can pick up their car.

Many service departments – not to mention other departments of the dealership – struggle with that timely and critical process.

The most common method – a phone call to the customer – usually results in a voicemail being left. In fact, that happens 87 percent of the time, according to John Nevins of BDC Bandits.

Most often the customer is at work or is otherwise occupied and won't take the call. That typically results in the customer calling the dealership when he or she is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 ►

free, which in turn most likely results in leaving a voicemail because the service writer or advisor is busy making calls to other service customers.

The end result is wasted time, labor costs and opportunity. It's inefficient, and in today's world, there's no reason for that to happen.

What if I told you rather than not making contact and leaving a voicemail 87 percent of the time, you could instead have a 90 percent chance your customers will receive your message in three minutes or less and a good chance they will respond within 15 minutes?

That shrinks the total communication timeline, keeps the work flowing and, most important, keeps the customer happy.

That's peak efficiency.

And that's SMS, or short messaging service, better known as text messaging. It's the most efficient mode of communication you can have with your customers today.

Those numbers come from Dynmark, which found in its 2015 Mobile Intelligence Review that 90 percent of all text messages are read within three minutes of being received, and in a previous study found 43 percent of business texts are returned within 15 minutes.

SMS texting celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2017. During that year more than 26 billion texts were sent per day,

according to the Statistic Brain Research Institute.

Today, that number is even greater.

And more important for independent dealers, a 2015 survey conducted by Instantly for RingCentral found 80 percent of people use texting for business, and a 2016 global survey by Twilio showed 89 percent of consumers would like to use text to communicate with businesses.

Text messaging is the most popular use of smartphones across every age demographic, with more than 90 percent of every age group reporting to the Pew Research Center they used their phones for text messaging during a weeklong "experience sampling" survey (see chart).

That survey found 97 percent of the overall sample of smartphone owners used text messaging at least once over the course of the study period, by far the most widely used basic feature.

All those statistics add up to the fact that text is clearly a powerful communication method that many of your customers want or expect. Especially in the service department, where communication is vital.

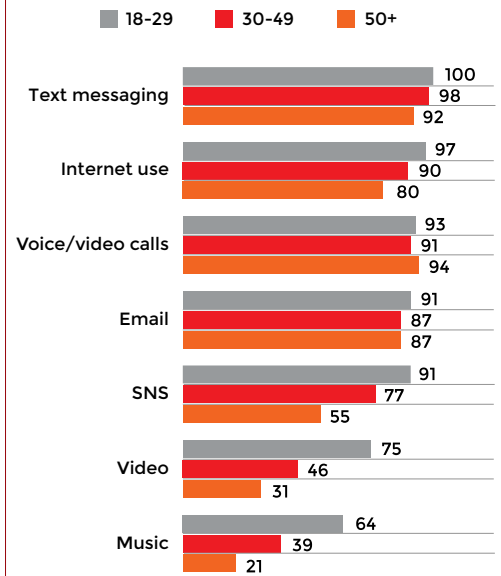
Think appointment setting and confirmation, approvals and authorizations. All customer contact tasks that fit perfectly into the service department setting via text messaging.

So the question is: What are you waiting for?

When I present at various conferences, I

### Some Features are Popular With a Broad Spectrum of Smartphone Owners; Social Networking, Watching Video, and Music/Podcasts are Especially Popular Among Young Users

*% of smartphone owners in each age group who used the following features on their phone at least once over the course of 14 surveys spanning a one-week period*



I'M ACQUIRING  
INVENTORY  
WITHOUT  
USING MY  
OWN MONEY  
AND I'M MORE  
SUCCESSFUL  
THAN EVER.



often ask the audience, “How many of you have read and/or responded to a text in the past hour?”

The result is typically 95 percent or more.

The reality is texting might be the most efficient and timely mode of communication ever created. And it’s non-intrusive, in that the recipient can read and respond when it’s convenient.

Do you think when you send a text to service customers for an approval or confirmation of an appointment it is not extremely high on their priority list, given it is likely you are addressing their primary mode of transportation?

It’s virtually a no-brainer to use text in the service department.

Let’s look at some key considerations when selecting a texting platform as well as examples of its use.

One key criterion when choosing a texting platform for your business is the ability to text-enable your main landline. Your customers have been calling you for years at your main service number, so why not support the same communication via text?

We’ve observed some service departments setting and confirming in excess of 70 percent of their appointments via text. Think about how much labor is saved using that method of appointment setting.

You should have complete availability for your customers to text your service number,

interact with the appropriate scheduler and set an appointment via text.

A confirmation text should be sent 24 hours before the established appointment. Textmaxx Pro has found appointment confirmation texts reduce no-shows among its clients by more than 60 percent, which has a major impact on productivity and profitability.

That is by far the most efficient, time-saving method to set, schedule and confirm your service appointments.

Another very effective way to use text is the review and approval of customer work in progress.

If you select a texting platform that supports multimedia messaging service (MMS), you can send pictures of tire tread wear, brake pad wear and virtually any worn or defective item that needs replacement.

That provides the customer with real-time proof of the need for the repair, and it’s an extremely powerful selling tool when you’re suggesting repair items – the proof is in the picture.

As a result, Textmaxx data shows the approval rate is typically more than 80 percent because the customer can see visual evidence of the needed repair, which lends credibility to your recommendation.

It also keeps the approval process moving so you can order parts and complete repairs, keeping the service department operating at peak efficiency.

Most of all, the customers appreciate the timely and straightforward mode of communication.

A third reason for using an SMS platform is perhaps the simplest.

You want to tell the customer when the car is done, right? Simply send a text saying, “Your vehicle service is complete and it’s ready to be picked up. Just text us when you want to stop by and it will be ready. Thank you for your business.”

More than 95 percent of customers reply to that form of text message, according to Textmaxx data. That is as easy and clean as customer service gets.

Once you have a texting communication strategy with your customers, endless opportunities open up, including marketing texts.

When business is slow you can send marketing texts to help fill the gaps in the service drive. Run oil change specials, customer appreciation events, free car wash Fridays, etc. The only limit is your imagination.

Remember, 90 percent of the people you send a text will read your message within three minutes of receipt. Try that with email, print, mail or a phone campaign. You simply cannot match that result.

While a proper texting strategy can provide an incredible opportunity for your service – and sales – department, there are some key considerations you should

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 ►

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keep in mind when selecting an SMS/MMS provider.

First, understand that using your employees' personal mobile devices is not a solution – after all, when they leave the dealership, they'll take your customer communication history with them.

You need a robust platform with a suite of features. Consider:

Will your SMS/MMS provider give you a platform that ensures compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and provides proper opt in/opt out capabilities to keep you from running afoul of federal regulation?

There are steep penalties – \$500 to

\$1,500 per text – for violating opt in/opt out regulations, so this is critical.

Next, does the provider have an easy-to-use interface with web access? Does the system warehouse and store all communications? That becomes as important, if not more important, than your CRM.

Can the provider send automated service reminders and broadcast messaging for marketing? Think about a 90-day reminder that's automated to send your customers a note to schedule their service work.

Does the provider have an app for iPhones and Android devices so your service staff can access the company's SMS product while using their own devices?

**There is no question texting is the most effective and efficient communication option available today, and every dealership should have a texting communication strategy for your sales and service departments.**

That saves expense dollars because you do not have to acquire smartphones or devices for everyone. When an employee leaves, you simply disable his or her credentials while retaining the history of texting activity in the texting platform.

Can the provider text-enable your landline number so your customers can send texts to your existing service department number or main dealership number?

Does the provider offer support during the startup and implementation phase to train your staff and help you establish your SMS strategy?

Those are a few of the basic considerations. Depending on the sophistication of your service department, that list might be longer.


The bottom line is you should select a provider that offers the most bang for your buck in your service department.

I often hear dealers say, "We use a free service we found online," and I cringe. Those systems almost never have proper opt in/opt out technology built in, and they often "throttle" or limit your usage to as few as 10 texts per day.

That's like putting a 49cc engine in a crew-cab dually.

There is no question texting is the most effective and efficient communication option available today, and every dealership should have a texting communication strategy for your sales and service departments.

It's as important as having phone capability, and it's expected to become even more critical in the next five to 10 years, as the expectation of your customers to communicate with you via text messaging continues to increase.

Start creating your strategy today. 



Chris Leedom is CEO of the Leedom Group, which includes Textmaxx Pro. He has worked with thousands of dealers over the past three decades and designed Textmaxx Pro specifically for the auto sales and service industry. He can be reached at (941) 371-7999, [chris@leedomgroup.com](mailto:chris@leedomgroup.com) or by texting "CHRIS" to 95000.



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