How to Use Text Messaging for Political Campaigns

by James Miller - Thursday, December 12, 2019

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Using text messaging for political campaigns can be tricky. You must send messages that get a response. But, political campaigns must also deal carefully with compliance and personal data issues.

Consumer data protection violations are most often reported by consumers themselves. And, people are even more willing to complain to the authorities about unwanted political text messages.

This means there are a couple layers to using text messages for political campaigns. But, the power of SMS can't be denied. So, political campaigns get a ton of benefit from taking the time to use text marketing the right way.

Here's a step-by-step guide to using SMS for political campaigns.

Validate phone numbers

Before you can send any text messages, you must setup your compliance and data validation. Sending text messages to unverified phone numbers could bankrupt a political campaign.

Every text message sent to a phone number on the DNC list or that gets reported as spam is potentially a separate TCPA violation.

At $500 to $1500 per violation, fines rack up quickly when you're sending mass text messages.

And, that's just one cost associated with using unverified phone numbers. Texting landlines is simply wasting text messages and money.

So, from a strictly financial standpoint, validating phone numbers is vital to the success of any political SMS program. And, that's to say nothing of all the paid and volunteer time that's wasted on invalid, disconnected, and incorrect phone numbers that comes from unvalidated phone numbers.

How to validate phone numbers

After all that fear mongering, here's some good news: validating phone numbers is actually simple and easy. The key is to ensure that your validation system does three things:

1. Check that phone numbers are usable (valid, not disconnected).
2. Check that phone numbers are not on the DNC (Do Not Call) List.
3. Identify cell phones and landlines.

This might sound like a lot. But, a good data partner can cover all of this quickly and cost-efficiently.

The technical methods for validating phone numbers are the same, no matter what. But, there are two ways to send numbers to your data provider for validation:

1. Batch processing.
2. Data integration.

Batch processing is a simple matter of uploading phone lists—in an Excel, .csv, or .txt file—for verification using your data partner's self-service interface.

Data integration connects your CRM or data management system to your data partner's system through an API. This method is best if you need to validate phone numbers in real time or require completely automated phone number verification.

Both methods give you the same level of data validation. Choose the one that best fits your needs.

Once your data validation is in place, it's safe to send text messages.

SMS broadcasting

Whether we like it or not, political campaigns are essentially marketing firms. Viewed from this perspective, SMS broadcasting or mass texting should be used for the middle of your [marketing funnel](#).

This means that you should only use mass text messages to communicate with voters who have expressed some interest in your candidate or party. Voters who have not expressed any interest are at the top of the funnel, and are most likely to report your text messages as spam, which negatively impacts your SMS deliverability.

Mass texting is also great for communicating within your teams.

Here's what to send in your text broadcasts:

- Election news.

- Fundraiser and rally invitations.

- Voting dates, registration cutoff dates, and other event reminders.

- Campaign announcements and news that's valuable to voters.
- Sending vote-by-mail information.
- Communication between campaign staff members.
- Coordinating volunteers.

Mass texting is the easiest and simplest way to use text messaging for political campaigns. All you need is a phone number (or a few) and a central system for sending out SMS blasts.

Text for info

Text messaging gets great response rates. And, it's a quick and easy way for voters to request and receive campaign information.

This is the type of texting you should use for voters who haven't been contacted yet. The reason is simple: you're simply reaching out to ask if they'd like more information. It's low pressure, and people can easily opt out of future text messages (*always* provide opt-out instructions).

However, voters will often request more information because text is private and personal. There's less outside pressure on people to take one side or the other. So, people will more readily act on their curiosity.

Text for info is the best way to engage voters who have not expressed interest in your campaign yet. It enables you to gather some information about what voters want, so you can send relevant text messages.

Text for information requires an SMS system that's capable of two-way communication. That way people can reply with "yes" or "no" to indicate whether they want to receive more text messages or not.

Here's what you can do with text for info:

- Send voter registration forms.
- Provide clickable links to donation pages, petitions, and campaign websites.
- Conduct surveys.
- Identify and engage potential volunteers.
- Provide voter registration forms.
- Create segmented mass text messaging lists.

Political campaign lead generation

SMS messages are limited to 160 characters. So, text messages aren't great for political persuasion. That requires long-form communication.

But, text messaging is a great way to identify voters who are interested in continuing the conversation through other media. That way you can save your direct mail, email, and phone calls for the voters who will be most receptive.

This is how to focus your SMS lead generation efforts:

- Get voter contact information.
- Collect email addresses and interests.
- Identify voters who *want* to receive phone calls.

Text messaging is clearly just part of a complete political campaign. However, it's remarkably effective for simple communication and supporting your other outreach channels (email, direct mail, phone).

Your political outreach efforts will be much more effective if you have SMS in the mix.

However, your text messaging campaigns will only work if you have validated phone numbers.

Get verified phone numbers

Ready to take the first step in using text messaging for political campaigns? Use the Searchbug [phone validator API](#) and [batch phone verification](#) to get verified phone numbers, separate cell phones from landlines, and avoid contacting phone numbers on the DNC list.

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