TEXT: YOU CAN'T PUT YOUR CUSTOMERS ON HOLD

Preliminary findings from the 2014 CXMB Corporate Benchmark Study.

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If you had to send a quick message to someone and wanted to ensure that they received it right away, what method of communication would you use? More often than not, people would choose text. In fact, according to the Mobile Marketing Association, 97% of text messages are read within the first three minutes of delivery, making it a much more efficient form of communication than email, which often goes unanswered.

This behavior and expectation has quickly translated from personal use to business use to customer service use. A recent survey conducted by Harris Poll, on behalf of OneReach, found that over 80% of consumers are frustrated with having to wait by the phone or computer for customer service help.

Texting can help brands be more human and relatable—customers no longer feel that their requests are lost in cyberspace. The immediacy of communication brings about a feeling of connection and importance. The opportunity to add this layer of communication has not been on the forefront of corporate America's mind, but the growing demand by customers may change that.

In the 2014 Edition of the CXMB Series, a joint initiative between Execs in the Know and Digital Roots, "Getting to Know the Connected Consumer" (www.execsintheknow.com/resources), **23% of all customers who used a mobile channel to contact customer care were using text.** We also asked consumers how important it was for a brand's customer service department to offer help options via a mobile device. On a scale of 1 to 10, **78% of people rated the importance of a text offering as a 6 or better, with 26% of people rating it as a 10.**

Execs in the Know and Digital Roots (www.digitalroots.com) will formally release these findings in February at the Customer Response Summit in Miami. Overall, the results of the 2014 Corporate Benchmark show us how corporations are responding to the needs of the connected consumer. However, I am compelled to share a few early results as they reveal a substantial gap between consumer desires and corporate plans.

What Brands Are Doing to Provide Text for Service

We asked corporate participants, "Does your company provide mobile care support that requires human assistance, such as mobile chat or SMS text?" Figure 1, *page 3,* shows their responses. We then asked, "What mobile care solutions does your company currently offer?" See Figure 2, *page 3*.

In our 2014 report, early insights show that 70% of 800-numbers designated for customer care are not text-enabled. With numerous research reports reflecting that customers want to communicate via SMS, why aren't brands not responding to this customer desire?

Why Adopt Text?

The conversation on text is eerily similar to the conversation we had on social media support three to five years ago. I distinctly remember conversations with brand leaders who told me that they were not yet "doing social."

The reality was that whether or not they had a social channel dedicated to service and were actively using it, customers were talking about them in the social space. The same is true for text.

"Whether or not you're ready, your 800-number is already text enabled," says Lance Christmann, director of UX at OneReach. "It's not about making it available—it is available. Ultimately, it comes down to how you choose to respond to those messages. You wouldn't stand for your phone not being answered, so why are you not answering your texts?"

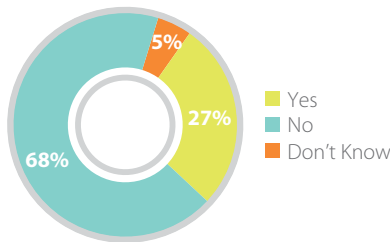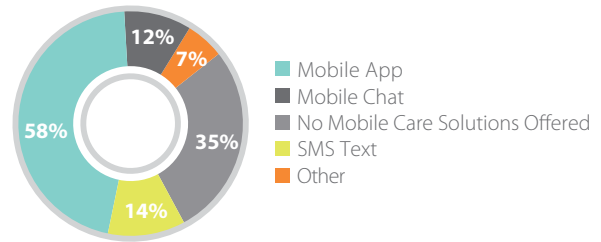**FIGURE 1:** Does your company provide mobile care support that requires human assistance, such as mobile chat or SMS text?

Yes 27%
No 68%
Don't Know 5%

FIGURE 2: Which mobile care solutions does your company currently offer?

Mobile App 58%
Mobile Chat 12%
No Mobile Care Solutions Offered 35%
SMS Text 14%
Other 7%

It's likely customers have attempted to text your brand's 800-number without you knowing. The fact that you haven't enabled text in your contact center doesn't matter—what matters is that customers want to contact your company this way.

Is your company's 800-number text enabled? If not, now is the time. Figure 3, *page 4,* shows participants' responses to this question.

Consumers have adapted to text so quickly that they don't think twice about texting a brand. However, some brands have only adopted SMS for marketing, not for service.

For example, when you receive a notification and have a question about it, isn't the natural reaction to want to respond on the same channel? This is quite similar to emails I've received that say, "DO NOT REPLY." Really?

As a past operational professional, I understand that this one-way communication flow made a lot of sense to ownership, IT and staffing. The reality, however, is that your consumer did not receive the flowchart on how they were expected to respond.

This expectation gap can be attributed to a lack of understanding about texting's service capabilities in the marketplace, as well as a brand's desires to mature on alternate channels of communication before adopting new ones.

With a current shift in consumers' preferences from wow moments to quick, efficient customer care transactions, the time may be now to review the benefits that text can offer the service experience.

Benefits for Your Customer, Benefits for the Business

In some cases, it's rather easy to identify the operational and financial gains that come from using text for customer service. Automated text responses for queries like, "What is my account balance?" or "Reset my password" can shoulder the burden of the high-cost service options of voice.

However, as all service professionals know, customer loyalty is the true goal. Providing service on your customer's channel of choice is one step. Making that service easy, fast, effective, personable and consistent is another.

Text is yet another channel that offers us this opportunity. However, OneReach's Christmann says it's best not to overthink it. "The quickest way find out if SMS is a channel that your customers prefer is to turn it on," he says. "You don't need to do a full business case to test the channel, you just need to pilot it."

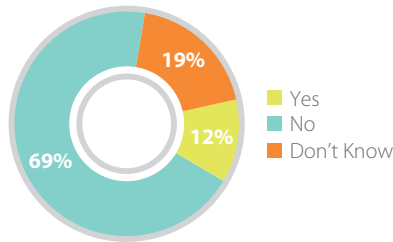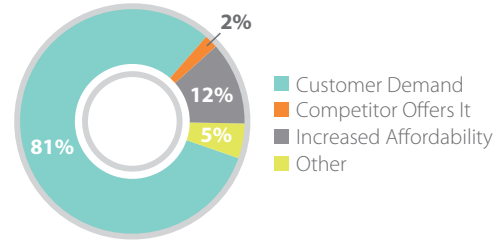FIGURE 3: Is your company's 800-number text-enabled?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

19%
12%
69%

FIGURE 4: What reason would most compel your organization to develop and/or expand the current mobile care channel in the future?

- Customer Demand
- Competitor Offers It
- Increased Affordability
- Other

2%
12%
5%
81%

View the full early findings or Executive report at www.execsintheknow.com/resources.

The easiest way to do this is by giving your customers the option to pivot from the voice channel to the text channel in your IVR.

"In one of our recent customer pilots, which took less than a week to turn up, they added the option for their customers to hang up and text an agent instead of holding on the line," says Christmann. "With this small change, they were able to track the data and, in 30 days, saw 20% of their customers did just that."

However, not everyone is going to have the same experience or the same need. Choosing which channel is right for you really depends on your customer base and your business case. As Christmann says, "the most important data will be your own."

The quest to reduce customer effort, meet customer preferences and provide a superior customer experience is on the minds of every brand today. It is, to some degree, the last competitive landscape.

For example, another early result from the CXMB Report reveals that corporations will start embracing text for service over the next year. Over 80% of the companies surveyed noted that customer demand would compel them to develop or expand their mobile channel strategy in the future. See Figure 4, *above*.

Brands have evolved their service offerings a great deal over the last five years. The continuing shift in communication style and technology adoption will surely continue to affect business communication, and ultimately, the engagements and interaction you have with your customer.

Maintaining that drive to understand your customer's communications preferences, and then embedding this into your customer care strategy, is what will ultimately help to deliver the desired customer experience.

Learn more at www.execsintheknow.com. ℗

Susan McDaniel is the Owner and Co-Founder of Execs in the Know. For over 15 years, Execs in the Know has built a reputation of excellence in the Customer Experience industry and a global community of over 60,000 customer experience professionals.

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To be a part of the full release of the CXMB Corporate report please join us in Miami, February 8th-10th at the Customer Response Summit.

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