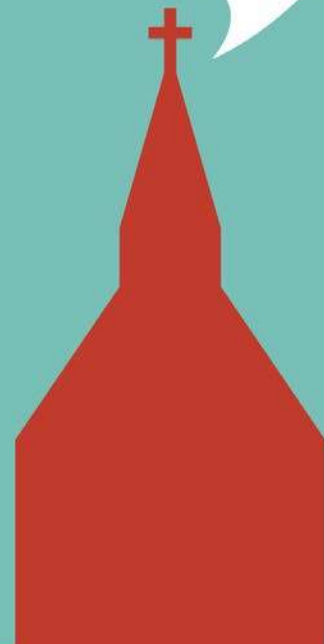# Texting in churches?

3 Ways that Top Churches are using Text and it's not what you think

Texting in churches?

3 Ways that Top Churches are using Text and it's not what you think

Texting in churches?

This eGuide contains vital information that your church needs to Grow, Connect, and Communicate. It presents information and recommendations that will help your church build healthy relationships via text messaging:

1. So, texting in churches? Where are we now?

2. Quick Recap: Why should your church even bother with text at all?

3. OK, texting IS an important communications tool. But what about email and push notifications?

4. Fine, I get why text is important now, but why does my church need to bother with a cloud-based solution (and not my phone or free apps)?
    I. Big bonus with using cloud-based apps instead of local apps.

5. Makes sense. So, I noticed some churches use short codes and others long. What's the deal?
    I. Short codes +/-
    II. Long codes +/-
    II. What else should I look out for?

6. A Reminder of the Top 3 Things You should already be Doing.
    I. Sharing
    II. Listening
    III. Inviting

7. That's cool. What are the 3 Things the Top Churches are Doing Now?
    I. Cultivating/Building relationships: Forget text; let's talk about relationships.
    II. Collecting and tracking data: taking the first steps
    III. Integrating the data: You've got the information; what's next?

8. So, you are ready to Level 2 your text strategy. Before diving in, remember these Simple Rules.

No matter your position in the church--pastor, deacon, elder, treasurer, technology director and webmaster, communications director, ministry leader, or faithful member-there is something for you in this ebook that will help your church Grow, Connect, and Communicate. In the pages that follow, you will learn about:

- The importance of texting as a communications tool
- Differences between texts, emails, and push notifications
- Advantages and disadvantages of both short and long codes
- Guidelines for using texting to build healthy, church relationships
- Tips to get the best results from your digital communications plan

So, texting in churches?
Where are we now?

You've most likely heard A LOT about including text messaging as part of a church communications plan. Some of what you've heard is in favor of including texting and some is against.

It can seem a bit confusing...

As a result of the confusion,

- **You might not be using text because you mistakenly think it doesn't work.**
- **You might be using text but NOT to its maximum effectiveness.**

Add to that the fact that text messaging has matured which means the rules have changed somewhat. Your users today are more choosy. If the texts they are receiving aren't relevant (spammy), chances are your users will unsubscribe from your text number (like unsubscribing from an email list).

So, what is the bottom line? Is including text in your digital strategy worth it?

Quick Recap: Why should your church even bother with text at all?

Mobile phones are the most used global communications device. Recent figures put the global figure for smartphone users at 2.6 billion … and growing.

What is the core phone function which most people use most often? In the U.S., it's texting—97% of the people text one or more times every day. That means the number of texts sent by the average American is DOUBLE the number of phone calls.

In some groups, the texting rate is even higher. Each Millennial, on average, sends 2,022 texts each month. That's 67 texts each day. Is your church part of those discussions?

"We like texts over phone calls," say 55% of people who send 50 or more daily texts.

Evidently!

And people rush to answer their texts: Answering an email? 90 minutes on average. Answering a text? About 90 seconds!

Can all this texting do anything positive for your church?

ABSOLUTELY! Here's an effect of texting in church: 50% more kids attending weekly services, 200% more kids attending events.

It's clear then that mobile devices are becoming the #1 choice for digital communications. In other words, if your church does not have a mobile communication strategy, chances are people aren't really hearing what you are saying.

Honestly, I think you get this. Let's go into the fun stuff.

OK, texting IS an important communications tool. But what about email and push notifications?

Many pastors, church leaders and ministers face the same problem: how to quickly communicate important information to your entire congregation.

In the past, there were easy, straightforward solutions. You could send something in the mail, hand out a note at church, or call people.

There was a time when writing a letter was the easiest way to communicate with family and friends all over the world.

Then, the computer was developed, and a while after that, the World Wide Web (Internet) sprang into existence. This combination enabled email.

Email was like a letter-writing revolution. It seemed like overnight, 'snail mail' became a thing of the past. Every email was opened with enthusiasm and curiosity. Now, most of us are VERY used to email. We scan the subject line and only open the most relevant ones—even if it is from someone we know!

As soon as cell phones became small enough to be carried on the hip or in the pocket, they became a consumer item that everybody seemed to need. Email was available to cell phone users at any time, anywhere. It was not long before text messaging evolved, but most consumers didn't understand how they could send anything of importance using just 160 characters.

Then, along came the teen-aged crowd and showed them how to abbreviate sentences to a minimum. Now, entire conversations are held over SMS text messaging and email has been left behind, with only 20% of all email messages being opened. Compare that to the number of text messages read within an hour, and there is no doubt which form of communication has become the norm within the electronically connected family. The lasting beauty of text messaging is it does not require any data/Internet subscription.

The emergence of numerous digital, mobile and online communication channels has created a wide variety of options and tools that you can use to get your message out.

If you are talking about communicating with people on their phones

in a more personal way, then you would look at text and mobile app push notes.

Text provides a way for you to send messages to everyone on your list. With mobile apps, on the other hand, you can use the push notes feature to send messages to everyone who has downloaded the app. Both of these should be part of a robust communications strategy, but many churches and ministries choose just one to get started.

Both of these tools will reach your audience quickly. When a message is sent, people are visually notified about it on the screens of their phones right away.

Email is not dead. It's a tool that many churches and ministries use to communicate with their members, and people use their phones to check email.

So how does this impact your mobile digital strategy? Here's a chart that compares these main mobile communication mediums in order to help you understand how they all fit into a comprehensive digital plan.

	Email	SMS/Text	Mobile App Push Notifications
Reach	Everyone on your email list.	Everyone whose cell phone number you have.	Only those who have downloaded your app and have notifications turned on.
Open Rate	Low open rate, about 20%.	Incredible 98% open rate.	Higher open rates, between 47% and 80%.
Cost	Practically free.	Practically free.	Included in the cost of your mobile app.
Type of Communication	Longer, more detailed communications.	Incredible 98% open rate. Must purchase credits to send texts.	Short messages, which invite engagement with more content.
Recipient Response	Extremely low response rate, about 6%.	Very good response rate, about 45%.	People are split about 50-50 on whether they like them or not.

Clearly, texting is more effective

in private, personalized, mobile communications.

Thus, including texting as one of the main tools in your complete digital strategy appears to be a no-brainer.

For those of you who are still using email as your **main** tool to communicate with your congregations, it is time to reconsider. Most of your audience simply does not open your emails. The best use for email is highly-targeted content that really adds value and motivates recipients to open the email, read it, and click through to your landing page.

A mobile app is a great tool for getting messages out to your congregation using push notes, but these have a lower open rate than text messaging. People simply don't open push notes as often as they open text messages. However, push notes open rates certainly exceed email open rates. In addition, only people who have downloaded your app and kept the notifications feature on will receive your messages. The bonus is that a mobile app provides robust functionality and is not limited to communicating brief messages.

Text messages are certainly the most efficient solution if you are looking to get a brief message out to the majority of people. With a 97% open rate, it is worth the small cost for each message. You can be certain that nearly everyone who receives the message will read it.

Fine, I get why text is important now, but why does my church need to bother with a cloud-based solution (and not my phone or free apps)?

With text messaging services like Viber, Skype, iMessenger, Google hangouts, WhatsApp, GroupMe, kik, etc. available for free use, why would you need anything else? For example, both GroupMe and WhatsApp are applications for a smartphone, but have a limited number of features. The application GroupMe allows you to create groups on your mobile device so you can send the same message to a group of people. You are able to add everyone within your address book to the GroupMe application which allows all messages sent in response to a group message to be propagated to the rest of the group. The application creates what is known as a private chat room. The WhatsApp application works in much the same way, but each user must have the application installed on the mobile device they will be using for sending the messages. These are applications that can be downloaded and used on mobile devices and are not suitable for use with large groups to opt-in and take action. Some of the limitations are:

	Your Phone's SMS The basic text application on your phone	Free SMS Apps Skype, WhatsApp Facebook Messenger	Cloud Based SMS Providers Most of our competitors, online	Top-notch Text, Social & Voice System Our platform for churches & ministries
Ideal # of users	1 - 3	10 – 50	unlimited*	unlimited*
Can work without the Internet?	yes	no	varies	yes
People can opt in/out	no	no	varies	yes
Create a unique keyword for easy promotion + opt in	no	no	some	yes
Compliant with TPCA laws	N/A	N/A	few	yes
Size of a campaign/group	micro	small	varies	all
Blast a message to text + social media simultaneously	no	no	few	yes
Offers voice broadcast to a list?	no	limited to app	few	yes
Offers Text-to-Screen, shuffle responder, voting/polling, reporting, automation, etc…	no	no	few	yes
Integrates with other apps / API Access	no	Rarely / extremely limited	varies	yes
Overall Cost effectiveness	☹	😐	☺	☺ ☺ ☺

Big bonus with using cloud-based apps instead of local apps.

API (Application Program Interface) is a way in which vendors can allow apps written in different languages to talk to each other. E.g. PastorsLine can talk to MailChimp or CCB or any other vendors we integrate with. These apps can talk together because they are connected by what is called 'the cloud' (a communications network).

Phones usually don't allow you to extend your SMS application that way unless you hack them—neither scalable OR legal! Other free apps such as Skype and WhatsApp are niche networks. They prefer you to use their apps and their solutions so they are not interested in integrating either. If they DO extend, it will be with very selected partners. Skype is probably not going to integrate with the solutions churches use.

Cloud-based text solutions

are usually built on architectures that are going to allow extensions to happen.

This means churches or the vendors can build integrations with other vendors, hence ensuring they can roll out a proper digital strategy. A digital strategy that is fully integrated, in which all your systems (or most of them) are speaking to each other, is worth the expense of using a cloud solution versus just your phone or some free app.

In sum, using a cloud-based app allows you to extend the application and integrate with other tools that you are using.

Makes sense. So, I noticed some churches use short codes and others long.
What's the deal?

There's a lot of discussion about which of the two opt-in choices is better—short-codes or long codes.

Just in case you are new to all this… Members and visitors must opt-in to be able to receive text messages sent by service providers. To do this, most service providers use what are called 'shortcodes' or 'long codes'.

Shortcodes, by nature, are short—usually five or six digits in length. For example, a shortcode could be 54321. A shortcode may be specific to one mobile operator or "common" and supported by all major mobile operators.

A long code is a 10-digit telephone number. In other words, a 'regular' telephone number.

Much of the answer lies in the formats of the codes themselves.

Shortcodes (being shorter) seem easier to say and remember. You can also send millions of messages in a shorter time without getting flagged by the cell phone carriers. So, shortcodes are great for sending a large number of messages quickly in a short time. This is typically called 'text marketing' aka 'blasting'.

Long codes are regular phone numbers with local area codes—hence, more familiar and more human. Since the long codes look more familiar, people are less hesitant about using them. As it's a phone number, people feel that there is a 'human at the other end' and are encouraged to communicate. Also, people feel that long codes rarely send spam. Lastly, for your church, building contact lists is usually easier with long codes and you can manually add names.

OK, but what about shortcodes being easier to remember?

Are they really? Long codes are a format which many of us have learned and used for quite a bit of our lives. And I'm sure lots of you can remember storing these 10-digit phone numbers in your heads. Then, from memory, you either dialed or pushed the buttons to make your calls. To make it even easier, churches have bought vanity numbers, e.g. 844mychurch or 'stick in your head' number sequences, e.g. 8441114445, etc.

Well, right, but every so often, our church needs to send large numbers of text messages in a short time.

No problem. PastorsLine has fixed the issue of sending large numbers of text messages without using a spammy-looking shortcode. We have allowed you to add secondary numbers.

http://help.pastorsline.com/church-community-builder-ccb/using-secondary-numbers

And there's more... Two major drawbacks to shortcodes are cost and lack of exclusivity. Shortcode costs of over $12k / year can put a big dent in a ministry's budget and the question is, "Is this the best stewardship of your resources?" If you are using a shortcode service, you are likely paying to "rent" or share access to the code and the cost. So the short code you are going to be using is a **shared shortcode.** This means that hundreds of other businesses and organizations (companies, concert halls, pubs, shops, other churches, etc.) can be using the same shortcode as you—but you have no control over *how* they are using it or *for which purposes.*

We have had several instances of feedback from clients who left PastorsLine and returned or left another shortcode service to use ours. *Why did they return or switch to us?* Their church members got messages from local bars or other ministries. And when the church member replied, if they didn't do it correctly, their message might have ended up in some else's Inbox.

Another main issue with shortcodes are that the **keywords** (words used to trigger autoreplies or other campaigns) are of a limited quality. E.g. If you want to use GIVE to 23232 or GUEST to 23232, you will be competing with other churches and non-profits. Once that organization uses this keyword, you would never be able to access it until that other company releases that keyword to the pool.

To solve this issue, we have done things like KIDZ (for kids) or Konnect (for connect). But it's not always easy—or quick—to tweak keywords.

With a unique local number, this whole issue has vanished. You will have a 'dictionary-full' number of keywords included as part of your account. Here's why: Since your number is unique, your keywords don't have to be.

E.g.

Church A will use GIVE to 888-111-2222

Church B will use Give to 777-000-3333

From our over X-year experience working in church communications with all sizes of churches from mega to mini, as well as the tweaks we have added (secondary send option) **we believe that your best option is to use only local numbers.**

So, which do I choose?

The type of relationship you want to create determines the choice.

Short codes feel more controlled, more professional. Users don't feel they are giving some random, unknown person their phone number. So, short codes suit large, anonymous situations such as public events and business campaigns. A recent use by a larger church was a wavechurch.com campaign. Wavechurch used a short code at their main service to encourage thousands of people to join their small groups. In addition to services, short code opt-ins suit large musical church events.

Long codes, on the other hand, are much more personal. The church can say, "Here's our pastor's number which is set up for both calls and text." This creates the feeling that the user is getting direct contact to the church team since the user needs to give their cell phone number. For most churches, the number of first-time guests tends to be low—usually 5 - 10% or fewer of the church membership AND these first-time guests are familiar with the church or someone connected with it. In these situations, the long codes do not have the same stigma but actually aid in building healthy, communicative relationships from the start.

What else should I look out for?

It's clear that you need to consider the shortcode/long code issue when choosing a cloud-based text messaging provider. Here are some other things you need to consider.

Be proactive by going to the company website to check out how active they are and if they are providing value. Are there any case studies? What about social media activity and blogging? What about the company's attention to best practices? Is the system church-focused? If the company is familiar with the church niche, they will most likely have relationships with other church vendors (programs, apps, etc.) which you are already using. Also, they will understand church culture which is usually going to mean that their solution and process reflect common values.

Speaking of integrating, does this company offer an API? If not, does it at least integrate with your current app vendors? Adding a digital tool that doesn't fit into your digital tool kit just doesn't make good sense.

Can you try it out easily, contract-free? Really, there is no reason why a reputable company is not able to let you try out their system with no obligation. Avoid contracts where you have to sign up for a year. Also dubious are trial options which ask for a small cost to cover the purchase of the phone number. If you are really sold on a 'pay first' system, speak to a salesperson before signing up in order to see as much of the system as possible.

It's your right to find out

if the system has the right fit for your church BEFORE you commit.

A Reminder of the Top 3 Things You should already be Doing.

If you are already using texting, then you are probably already doing these 3 things. If you are new to using texting, here are the top 3 activities most churches should be doing to get started.

I. Sharing

Sending emergency updates, news updates and newsletters: One of the main reasons for using SMS messaging is to keep your members updated. Sending out emergency messages asking for prayers or help for members who have encountered hard times or medical emergencies is extremely important. The Cross of Glory Church, Hopkins, MN is using SMS texting to keep their members informed about the weather and emergency situations in their area.

II. Listening

Creating discussions on current events: Using social media is an excellent way to stimulate discussions among your members, get ideas in terms of what they think in relation to specific topics and/or to source topics for use in future services. The North Shore Bridge Church in Boston, MA is using text messages to create discussion groups among its members. The Faith Lutheran Youth Group from Clive, IA has been using discussions to increase attendance, involvement, and to lift the spirituality of both current and new members.

Finding out what members want to talk about using surveys: Creating surveys is fun and easy to do. You can craft messages that will elicit responses to questions using many types of question templates. Multiple choice questions, true or false, and short answer are some of the ways in which you can craft a question. Your members can text back their answers that can then be tabulated for research and creation of a new question. Members of the Cornerstone Community Church in Galax, VA are taking surveys in church so members can vote on what they want to hear in their sermons.

Gathering ideas on sermons, community needs and special events: You can send out a text message with a number of different discussion ideas, asking your members to text back their thoughts on what they would like to hear about. Sending messages regarding the needs of your community or special events is a great way to keep members continually involved. Wave Church in Virginia Beach, VA uses text to advertise their annual conferences and to update attendees before, during and after the event.

Promoting recorded sermons and special prayers: Sending messages containing links to your website, newsletters, videos of important sermons, or other relevant information, helps your members to keep up with the church's life when they are unable to attend. The Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Simcoe, Ontario, Canada uses video recorded sermons to reach all of their shut-in members.

III. Inviting

Encouraging meeting attendance and setting up meetings with members: Here is where churches can increase member and visitor attendance with event options such as Wednesday night Youth Services and special weekend events. Have a another event similar to the one your first-time guest attended? Fire off a text inviting him or her to "another one you might enjoy". Current members can be encouraged to come out to special events or mid-week services instead of just going out with friends to the movies or a bar. The Wave Church in Virginia Beach, VA, connects with small groups where each has its own keyword code as well as a mobile form, enabling each small group to contact their members.

Providing your members

with long codes offers them easy and effective ways to reach out and contact you whenever and wherever they need to do so.

Collecting donations for church goals such as needy parishioners and special events: Many churches are using portals to collect donations for specific goals; for example: sending a church group to a conference, carrying out repairs to the church structure, etc. Text messages keep your members updated on where you are at in reaching your goals and celebrate with them when you have reached or surpassed a goal. While in-service collections continue to fall by the wayside, online and mobile donations are on the rise. Collecting digital donations is simple: members send a message via a long code or are directed to a donation portal. Parishioners of Stevens Creek Church in Augusta, GA, make donations with their phones via a mobile app.

There are two different types of mobile text giving. The simplest type is one in which someone texts 'GIVE' to 83434 (or 888-777-6543) and an auto response comes back to a link where they can give online.

But if it only does that, then you pretty much have a simple way to auto-info people where to find your online giving but you don't truly have text-to-give. Text-to-give is going to send you to a mobile phone once to enter your card, but each time after that, you can easily just text the amount to the number and everything happens via text.

Even short codes offer giving but you can't usually use the word GIVE. Since the short code is shared by many uses, they will have to use something like 'GiveMetro' or 'GiveChurchname' or 'Give1232'.

With a long code text-to-give option, you can generally set it to whatever you wish or at least, you will be able to use standard words like 'GIVE', 'DONATE', 'MISSION', etc. to launch a giving campaign that is branded and easy to remember.

It is important to distinguish between mass text communication and text-to-give. Web Apps that are set up for text-to-give are usually not going to allow you to send mass messages to your audience (nor it is advised to do this). A clearer option would be to use two different text solution providers or at least different numbers: one for text-to-give and the other for listening, sharing and inviting (attendance).

Using mobile phone for text-to-give
as part of your church giving strategy is HUGE!

Here's why:
- Most people don't carry around spare change.
- In general, $50 is the most that 80 percent of Americans usually have on them.
- Check-writing is basically a thing of the past. Almost ¾ of all Americans pay by check less than once a month. For those under 25, it's even less—61 percent never write checks at all!
- Payments have moved away from cash and checks (84 percent) to credit and debit (82 percent). **[source]**

So, HOW are they paying? Lots are using their mobile phones. In recent years, payments via cell phones have increased from $30B to $545B (106% CAGR). **[source]**

This amazing growth rate is predicted to continue with the younger generations for whom paying by phone is the norm.

That's cool. What are the 3 Things the Top Churches are Doing Now?

Solid, healthy relationships take time and patience. Some relationships take off after the first or second meeting. Usually, though, it is the steady, consistent interaction which creates the bond. They say it takes 7 points of contact to "sell" anyone. **[source]** So, too, with first-time church visitors. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will be your relationship with your first-time guest. What needs to happen is a deliberate strategy to engage.

Churches need to keep the conversation going, collect visitor data to personalize the interactions, and integrate that data with other communication systems to help forge the bond.

I. Cultivating/Building relationships: Forget text; let's talk about relationships.

In the 'old days' before smartphones, many of us ran home after school, excited to get online and see who was in our chat room. Remember?

It's the same with effective texting.

You know those 4-letter words we shouldn't say? If there was a 5-letter word list for texting, the first one would be "blast".

Mail blasts and auto messaging are not recommended.

The replacement is relevant campaigns and individualized follow-up.

That means sending more than just text, like emoticons and pictures. Personalizing the messages so they feel human, friendly, and specific to that user. Re-using keywords is suggested. This familiarity helps people feel so comfortable with the opt-in process it becomes a habit.

Hi (name). How's it going? (suitable emoticon) Missed U last Wed. at the prayer meeting. Look fwd to seeing U tonite.

Congrats, (name)! Heard you had a baby girl. (small icon: baby bottle, rattle, or bunch of flowers) How wonderful. Hope all is well.

II. Collecting and tracking data: taking the first steps

Proper communication requires proper data. One of the first steps is collecting additional user-specific data. This is usually done using tags or custom fields. Collecting user-specific data creates a healthy, personalized, church communications system by organizing contacts into groups, such as the Youth Study Team. But it goes beyond more than just grouping contacts. An example is adding a 'prayer' tag to those who mention that need. Then, you can follow-up with "Need prayer?" to just those tagged contacts. You now will be able to create broader groups of contacts as well as tagged contacts to help you segment your list and communicate what your audience wants.

Think about Twitter lists vs. hashtags or Facebook broad groups vs. Facebook demographics data used in ads, etc.

Overall, collecting user-specific data is a management tool for RELEVANT simple/complex campaigns + group vs. individual communications.

It gives you the tools to stop "blasting" all and reaching few. Your list is more than numbers.

Top churches are developing people profiles through intelligent data capture.

III. Integrating the data: You've got the information; what's next?

Many churches are already using other excellent communication systems such as sharing, listening, or inviting. Even others are collecting data and sending smart messages. One thing that top churches **are** doing is making sure that their systems talk to each other. Is your church doing this, too? If not, this creates a situation where the same data has to be manually entered into more than one system. The result? Time-wasting repetition + chances of inaccuracy as data keeps being entered and re-entered.

E.g. Imagine doing this first-time guest follow-up sequence: You simply place a graphic up in the welcome center of your church during your guest welcome segment that says, "First time with us? We have a special gift for you. Text WELCOME to 888-333-3333." You will then either send them to a digital connect card or better, trigger digital connect texts where you can collect additional info like name and email.

Will you have to come back that evening and merge that data into your email newsletter like MailChimp or your Church Management system? NO! You can automatically send this information over to specific groups or lists where you may have a few additional automations occurring or at the minimum, allow your team members to access the information they need without waiting for someone else to email them the list of names.

Top churches want that data

to be sent automatically to the next step and prevent people from falling through the cracks due to holes in the process.

Remember, to be more effective in communication, you need to have a digital strategy. This means sharing Jesus with others digitally so people are moved through the stages of discipleship. When you have systems talking to each other, you can maximize your time while simultaneously minimizing errors, reducing volunteer staff frustration, and preventing visitors falling through the cracks along the way.

So what about solutions that offer all of this in one tool. Easy, right?

Not quite. Chances are you will outgrow that tool within weeks if you are following a church digital strategy. Besides, there are only a handful of companies (like super big boys such as Google) who can offer tons of things in one app. Even so, they are usually ineffective when going outside their niche.

Church vendors that lure you

in with having everything all-in-one are stockpiling options to increase the perceived value of the product without thinking about the bigger picture.

And even if they do, they would not be able to adapt to the changing needs within the digital space.

That's why it's important not just to look at all the add-ons but also consider all the tools that you need for a full communications strategy, including guest follow-up for example, and ensure these tools can speak together. If you need to switch out any of those digital tools, it will be super easy to do and you can continue to use the digital tools that are working.

Your church texting system should

integrate with the other systems you are already using, reducing errors, and making much better use of your (and your team's) time.

So, you are ready to Level 2 your text strategy.

Before diving in, let's look at the Anatomy of a Guest Follow-up Dialogue.

To grow a healthy church you need to think **RELATIONSHIPS**. One powerful way to create and sustain strong relationships in today's 'digital' world is through text.

But how can you use texting to get your first-time guest to 'fall in love' with your church? **If the church is people, and people are social, let's forget about texting and let's talk about relationships.**

Ideally, the church will have enough leaders to personally visit every single guest who attends church. Of course, assuming that guests would be happy with a random show-up at the door or will be living simple lives so they are at home when you come around.

Or perhaps your church has the staff and time to call each visitor. But less than 10% of guests will actually pick up.

What about sending a personalized, handwritten note? That works really well. But is that your best first move in a process that might take about 7 days before the user receives it?

A text is the best option.

Texting is less stressful,

less intrusive. You can read texts or not. You can respond or not. You can do either or both at times that suit YOU.

Think about saying "hello" to your first crush. Do you ask them for their age, credit score, and email or do you just say "hi", smile, then develop the relationship over time?

Also, 90% of text messages are read within 3 Minutes.

So, let's talk about the anatomy of the guest follow-up dialogue.

1. Decide on the purpose of your account:

Make a decision on what the number will be used for. Does a specific number "belong" to the pastor (or a leader) or is it a ministry's number? Our system does allow you to add unlimited numbers and the multi-user option will also help with this allocation. The idea is to ensure that the members or guests are trained as to what numbers are what. It's not a major mistake but you do lose engagement if it feels like it's coming from a person then suddenly it shifts to be a communication blast.

If you are using a number

for guest follow-up, then consider not using that same number for other internal announcements. Getting a second number for events might make sense.

2. Get permission.

You can either have people opt-in specifically or let your first text be clear about who it is from. This is more important if you are using a specific number for mass communication, alerts etc. If you are using this as a pseudo-personal number and it's never being used for mass communication or for general alerts, then signing it or introducing yourself is fine. e.g.

Hi [Firstname], this is Michelle at Real Life Church. Just reaching out to say thanks for visiting us this wknd and if you have any questions, I am here for you.
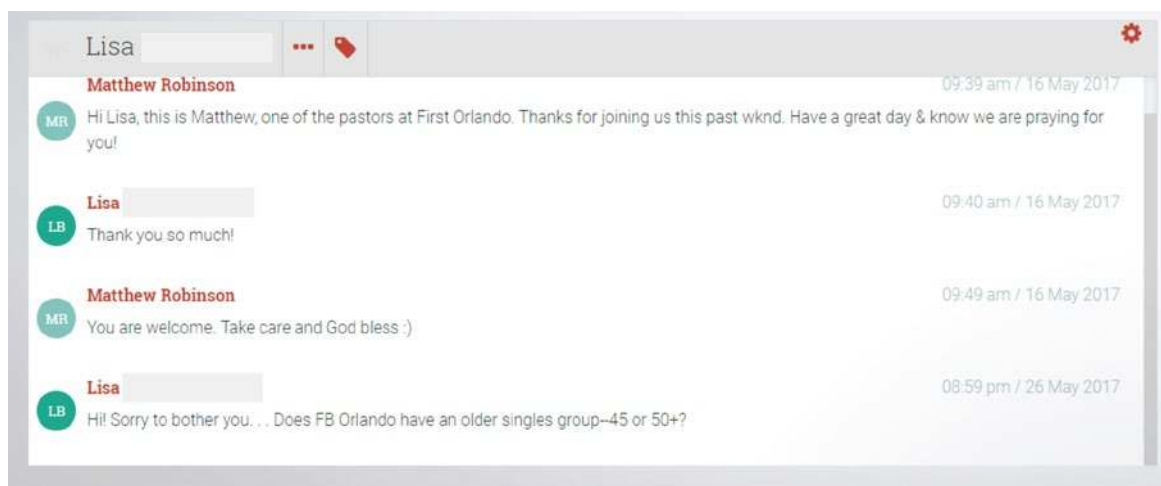
OR Hi [Firstname], ………………………………………………. – Michelle

OR Hi [Firstname], this is John with the communication department. This number will be used to send infrequent bi-weekly updates. Reply STOP at any time to OptOut.

3. Timing is everything.

Choose the time of day wisely. When you want to reach a specific sub-group of your members, you may want to think about the time of the day and the day of the week when they will be most likely available and willing to chime in on a conversation or to read your message.

4. Use the first name merge field appropriately.

If you are doing a guest follow-up, you would want to use it naturally. If every text starts with "Hi Jason", it may be awkward or feel disingenuous. Create messages that will compel your members to think and want to provide answers or comments. This type of open message often provides you with an insight into new ideas and can create further conversation.

5. Keep it simple.

People tune out when a conversation becomes lengthy. Shorten conversations by providing new points of interest. Remember, it's best to keep your message within 160 characters to communicate your message.

6. Keep it 2-way.

You need to respond. Find excuses to reply and keep the conversation going. As you grow, you can add a team to help. Let your contacts know that you care. Text is a social, relationship-building medium (like Facebook). Think beyond the 10 digits and your agenda.
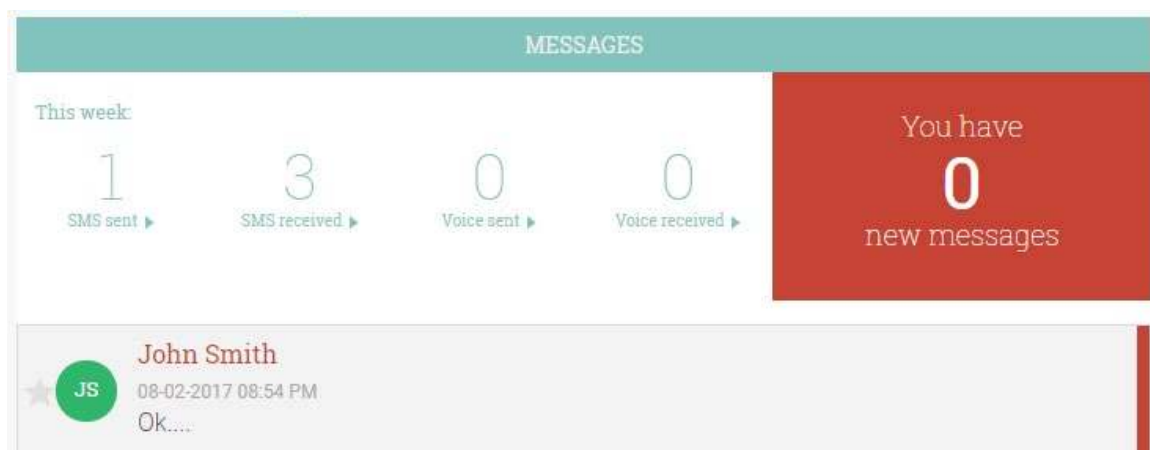
7. Blasting one-way communications are kind of like shouting at your members/guests by sending out texts of events but never engaging.

Why do churches blast? They may be smaller churches who are using text as another way to share announcements. Or churches which may not have the time (or the team) to text in a more effective way. One big mistake is ignoring replies from members or visitors. Remember that blasting to someone's cell is a powerful option so don't abuse it. Seek out the needs of your subscribers first like Jesus did. If you are going to use text for updates or announcements only, that's a loss. Accounts on *PastorsLine* that only send weekly announcements, decrease in engagement, significantly. Remember, it's all about relationship. Nothing else matters. And not just on the weekend. A midweek word of encouragement might be surprisingly beneficial.

8. Before sending a follow-up blast, always respond to all unread messages.

It's very unlikely that when you are chatting with someone directly, you are going to just press 'send'—ignoring their question or the thread of the last conversation. So, a rule of thumb – keep it authentic: never send a group blast before resolving all your unread messages.

9. Respect your members' privacy.

Never give out any of their personal information, either on social media or in a text message. Your members and visitors may be happy to supply their own numbers in a text message and allow you to do so, but never do this without their permission.

If the points above sound like too much at the moment, remember the 3 guiding principles that you can begin to implement today.

- **Build Relationships** – Your audience is real humans beings. Treat them as such— not just numbers in a database. It's about building relationships. 2-way communication is important.

- **Address Their Needs** – Think about your audience's needs like Jesus did. It's not about you and your agenda. Only "shouting" at your list about your events will appear selfish. It will turn off your audience. If they know that you care, they will care about what you know or have to offer.

- **Create a Text Strategy** – Make it strategic and very deliberate. Don't just "try it" or "let someone else do it". Let the focus be the essence of your text messaging strategy.
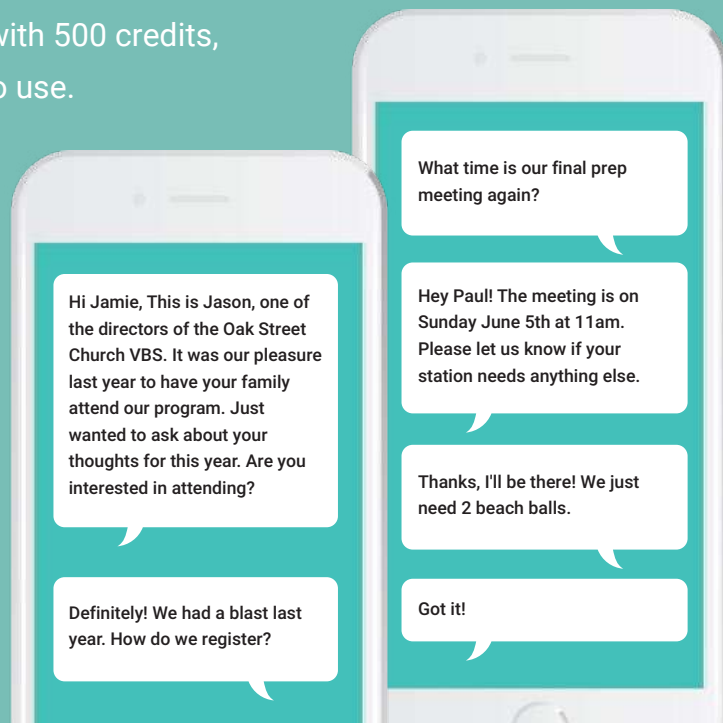
So text like Jesus would. That's it.

Use the invite code **EBOOK** to get a free 30-day trial with 500 additional credits.

Our standard free trial comes with 500 credits, so you will have 1000 credits to use. No CC required.

SIGN UP HERE

pastorsline.com/register

Hi Jamie, This is Jason, one of the directors of the Oak Street Church VBS. It was our pleasure last year to have your family attend our program. Just wanted to ask about your thoughts for this year. Are you interested in attending?

Definitely! We had a blast last year. How do we register?

What time is our final prep meeting again?

Hey Paul! The meeting is on Sunday June 5th at 11am. Please let us know if your station needs anything else.

Thanks, I'll be there! We just need 2 beach balls.

Got it!

Zeke Vas
Pastor

The text message Bible study invites are working great. We saw a huge increase from 5-6 to 10-12 and the numbers stayed consistent.

Wyatt Allen
Evangelist, End Time Hope

When we finished our evangelistic event in Houston, 70% of those who were baptized, communicated with me through PastorsLine… it had a big influence.

Julie
Children's Ministry Leader

Text messaging is the preferred communication channel for [our] club… It takes a lot less time and everyone gets the message.

pastorsline