

# THE MEN'S STORE

## Thinking about using SMS to communicate with audiences?

Matt Jameson, Store Manager, *The Men's Store*, shares the lessons he has learnt.

Established in 2004, The Men's Store was one of the first salons, if not *the* first, on the Glasgow high street catering specifically for male-only grooming. Originally, The Men's Store was largely a retail store with a few treatment facilities; the business has since evolved, as **men's grooming** became more popular and acceptable, to mostly consist of treatments supported by a limited retail range. Beyond men's cuts and hairstyling, The Men's Store services include waxing, massage, facial treatments and nail-care.



©The Men's Store

The business continues to evolve as men's intimate waxing becomes increasingly popular across the men's fitness, sporting and lifestyle scenes. The Men's Store is also a popular destination with female customers finding our vouchers a preferred option for gifts that are "something a little different". We therefore have a wide range of customers using the store.

*Target* customers of The Men's Store are of course men. Beyond that, there are no 'typical' clients: daily, we will see a wide range of customers come through the doors... Our clients may be professionals, students or retirees and they may be straight, gay, single or married.

As with many young SME's, our main marketing challenge lies with budgetary constraints; during these austere times, advertising spend is typically a luxury. Marketing initiatives just now tend to rely on Facebook and Twitter or taking a direct approach with local businesses.

However, one marketing tool that we are thinking of investing more heavily in is SMS.

The Men's Store first installed a computerised booking system in 2005 and this is when we first started using SMS. Any customer who provides their mobile contact number is signed up for SMS alerts, although they typically receive only texts reminding them of their next appointment.

At the time of booking, although we do advise them that we don't share their details with any third party, we don't advise them that their number may be used for marketing purposes by The Men's Store. So, as yet, we have not been able to fully use SMS as a marketing tool.

Do customers mind receiving appointment reminder texts?

Whether or not they were expecting it, most guys appreciate the reminder text and see it as a legitimate use of their contact details. Salons are using this more and more nowadays so most people are not surprised when you ask to sign them up and the majority say yes.

We are at a point of reviewing how we currently use SMS as we recognise we are not necessarily using it to its full potential. We have also learnt some useful lessons over the years, three of which are outlined below in these three questions I'd urge you to consider if you are thinking of using SMS.

1) How do we want to use SMS?

Back in 2005, we anticipated the SMS activity to be for appointment reminders only and so we didn't seek permission for any further contact via SMS. If we were now to use SMS as a marketing tool, with targeted campaigns, I believe we'd have to address new and existing clients with our intentions and allow them to opt-out. This isn't such a problem with new customers as we could ask them at the point they sign up for SMS contact. Existing customers would be a different story. We would probably have to re-ask as and when they come into the store and book for their next appointment. This is something we really have to think through as it could be time-consuming for staff. We would also need to be clear about what we mean by marketing activity.

2) Does the technology have a large enough character allowance?

Secondly, our current system is unlikely to have enough of a character allowance that enables a message to carry a marketing message and, what I presume is legally required as a minimum, an opt-out instruction. This is something you have to bear in mind if you are investing in SMS technology. Sending a straightforward appointment reminder does not use very many characters and so the current system has done the job so far but we recognise we may now have to upgrade or change our system altogether if we want to change the nature of our messages.

### 3) Can the system handle sending out bulk and/or targeted messages?

Another drawback of our current system is that the database is, having been in operation since the system was launched, particularly big and unwieldy. Sending out targeted messages can therefore be tricky. We found this out last year when we had to send out a group message to specific customers. Unfortunately the system didn't quite match the range we required and also texted clients we did not mean to contact. Our feelings are that the current system is possibly too basic. I would therefore urge anyone setting up SMS to talk this through with the provider at the outset – be clear that the system will meet your needs.

I do think, however, that with a more up-to-date system with a slightly more user-friendly SMS system, we could be doing more with such a facility and again we'd also need to update our booking procedures to include an Opt-In/Out choice. We'd primarily like to use SMS for sales promotion.

And what wouldn't we do?

- 1) We'd like to use SMS to promote discounts, but we would have to limit the number of campaigns and ensure there was a good break in between each. I note from Facebook, for example, that if we post too frequently we lose a follower or two. The last thing we'd want to do with any communication with our clients is pester and alienate them so we'd need to ensure that whatever message we send is worthwhile for them to receive.
- 2) We wouldn't use SMS as a means to send out news updates – Facebook, Twitter and conversation with the clients in-house already cover that appropriately. Although a major news story (e.g. we've moved premises!) would be a likely exception.
- 3) Send texts at silly times of the day. This sounds obvious but we are talking about busy people here and we wouldn't want to send a text earlier than 10.30am which is when we send out the majority of our texts (which is shortly after we open for the day). But on Saturdays, for example, I make a point of waiting until about lunchtime to send the texts out... No point waking up our clients who may be wanting a bit of a weekend lie-in!

Finally, what are the costs?

There tend to be a variety of packages available with different numbers of SMS texts available to purchase: typically we buy 1000 at a time for £100 (although there are better deals available for higher spends). If we were to use SMS for a marketing campaign, I'd consider this much better value than advertising spend such as newspaper, TV as of course an SMS campaign reaches only people who are interested in hearing what we have to offer.

Matt Jameson

[matt@themensstore.com](mailto:matt@themensstore.com)

[www.themensstore.com](http://www.themensstore.com)