

POCKET POWER: USING SMS TO RESCUE SUBSCRIBER REVENUE AND DRIVE ENGAGEMENT



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THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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N.E.A.C.E.

NorthEast Association of Communication Executives
Advertising • Circulation • Marketing • Operations • Production



LEVERAGING SMS FOR PUBLISHERS AND MEDIA COMPANIES

*"If email is your newsletter...
SMS is your cash register!"*

--Aaron J. Kotarek



What To Expect From This Session

Publishers and media companies are grappling with steep declines in site traffic and repeat visits as social platforms de-prioritize news and search is being taken over by AI. In this session, we'll explore simple but powerful ways to leverage SMS to:



Build direct audience relationships outside of algorithmic platforms



Re-engage and retain subscribers with direct and personalized messaging

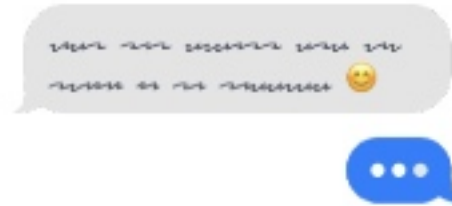


Unlock new revenue streams through advertising and sponsorships

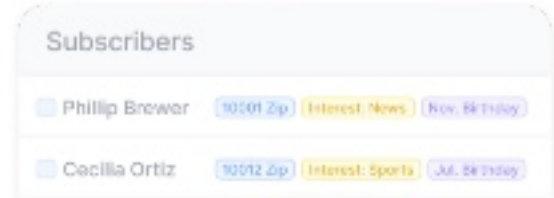
What You'll Come Away With



Ways to leverage SMS as a channel to drive subscriptions and retention, as well as new advertising opportunities.



The value of one-to-one, one-to-many and two-way communication and how you can automate this experience for both sides to create great experiences for your readers, while learning ways to improve your efforts and tactics as an organization.



Best practices and use cases for capturing critical first-party data on every segment of your audience.



**THE VAST
MAJORITY OF
AMERICANS...**

**98% – NOW
OWN A
CELLPHONE OF
SOME KIND**



	Ages 18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Cellphone	99	99	98	95

SMS DOMINATES EVERY CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT METRIC

THE PERFORMANCE GAP: SMS VS EMAIL

METRIC	SMS	EMAIL	SMS ADVANTAGE
 OPEN RATE	~98%	~20–32%	↑ 3–5x HIGHER
 READ SPEED	90% read within 3 minutes	Hours to days (if opened)	↑ UP TO 48x FASTER
 CLICK-THROUGH RATE (CTR)	~18–22%	~2–5%	↑ 4–10x HIGHER
 RESPONSE RATE	~45%	~6%	↑ 7x HIGHER
 CONVERSION RATE	Up to ~29%	~15%	↑ NEARLY 2x HIGHER

 **SMS DELIVERS 5–10x HIGHER ENGAGEMENT ACROSS EVERY MEANINGFUL KPI**

 Engagement velocity (minutes vs hours) fundamentally changes conversion windows and revenue timing.

Sources: Venng, Mailmodo, Tabular, Campaign Monitor, EZ Testing

WHY SMS WINS – THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

WHY EMAIL STRUGGLES

-  Inbox saturation (hundreds of emails/day)
-  Spam filtering & deliverability gaps (messages never seen)
-  Delayed consumption (hours or never)
-  Passive channel—requires user intent to check



SMS is the only channel that **guarantees near-immediate attention at scale.**

WHY SMS WINS

-  Always-on device (mobile-first behavior)
-  Instant visibility (lock screen delivery)
-  High trust & attention (personal channel)
-  Action-oriented format (short, direct CTA)



SPEED = REVENUE

The faster the message is seen, the higher the conversion probability.



TURN DORMANT INTO REVENUE

SMS turns dormant subscribers into active revenue in minutes—not days.



RECOVER. REENGAGE. RETAIN.

Rescue subscriber revenue and strengthen lifelong engagement.

SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Email builds the relationship.
SMS drives the results.

**IF EMAIL IS YOUR NEWSLETTER...
SMS IS YOUR CASH REGISTER.**

A NEW WAY FOR SUBSCRIBERS TO COMMUNICATE



Two-way Communication

Subscribers can respond to messages directly by replying to the text.

4% response rate

Users ask questions about their account or reply with concerns about the content of the message

COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE METRICS: SMS VS. EMAIL



SMS Open Rate

SMS has a significantly higher open rate of 98%, showing strong user engagement compared to Email.

Email Open Rate

Email open rate is lower at approximately 20-32%, indicating less immediate visibility compared to SMS.

SMS Click-Through Rate

SMS click-through rate (CTR) is 21%, demonstrating better interaction rates over Email CTR.

Email Click-Through Rate

Email CTR is much lower at 4%, suggesting less engagement in email marketing campaigns.

Measurable, Immediate ROI

Faster Conversions. Higher Retention.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR SMS AS A CHANNEL



High Open Rates

SMS messages have a 98% open rate, making it highly effective for reaching audiences quickly. Near-Instant Visibility and Read Rates!

Strong Engagement

Publishers experience over 30% engagement rates through SMS, enhancing audience interaction. Click-through and response rates significantly exceed email!

Direct Audience Access (POCKET POWER)

SMS provides instant access to subscribers' phones for timely communication and messaging.

Two-Way Communication

SMS allows two-way communication, enabling feedback and interaction between brands and audiences.

Collect First Party Data!

**SMS IS THE
GREAT
ATTENTION
ACCELERATOR**



“SMS is the only channel that guarantees near-immediate attention at scale.”



“Speed = Revenue: The faster the message is seen, the higher the conversion probability.”



“SMS turns dormant subscribers into active revenue in minutes—not days.”

CHALLENGES FACED BY PUBLISHERS AND MEDIA COMPANIES



1. Declining Effectiveness of Traditional Channels

Email once the backbone of subscriber communication is losing impact

2. Fragmented Audience Attention

Subscribers now live across multiple platforms (SMS, apps, social, web, email)

3. Weak Real-Time Engagement Capability

Most publishers still operate on delayed communication cycles

4. Limited Personalization at Scale

Despite having rich first-party data, many organizations struggle to segment audiences meaningfully, tailor messaging based on behavior, and deliver dynamic, triggered communications

5. Churn Driven by Communication Gaps

A significant percentage of subscriber loss isn't product dissatisfaction....it's communication failure

6. Underutilization of High-Impact Channels (SMS & Mobile)



SMS STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING DIRECT AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

Direct Audience Relationships

Building direct relationships bypasses algorithmic platforms for more control and authenticity.

Subscriber Engagement

Personalized SMS messaging helps re-engage and retain subscribers effectively.

Revenue Opportunities

Advertising and sponsorships through SMS unlock new revenue streams.

OVERVIEW OF SMS CHANNELS FOR PUBLISHERS



Retention Channel

SMS retention channels help maintain ongoing relationships and keep users engaged over time.

Re-activation Channel

Re-activation channels use SMS to revive inactive users and encourage renewed activity.

Advertising Channel

Advertising channels deliver promotional SMS campaigns to drive sales and increase awareness.

Engagement Channel

Engagement channels focus on interactive SMS to boost user participation and feedback.



EFFECTIVELY UTILIZING SMS MESSAGING

CRAFT THE MESSAGE WITH INTENTION

SMS consumers are wary of spam

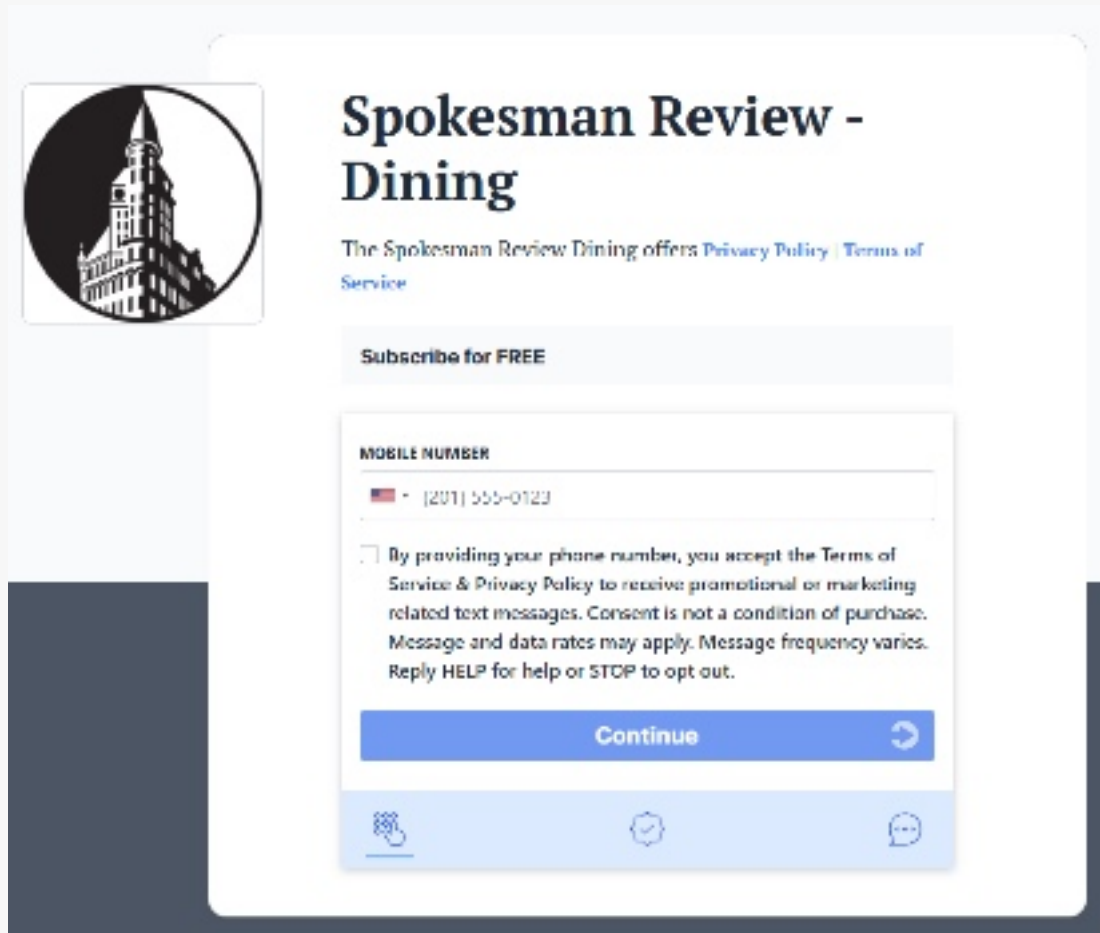
Brand the message

Direct link to your O&O

Don't be afraid to use full URL
instead of randomized short links



BEST PRACTICES FOR CAPTURING FIRST-PARTY AUDIENCE DATA



The image shows a mobile app interface for 'Spokesman Review - Dining'. At the top left is a circular logo featuring a black and white illustration of a building. To the right of the logo, the title 'Spokesman Review - Dining' is displayed in a bold, dark font. Below the title, a line of text states 'The Spokesman Review Dining offers [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)'. A light blue button labeled 'Subscribe for FREE' is positioned below this text. Underneath the button is a 'MOBILE NUMBER' input field. The field contains a US flag icon, a plus sign, and the number '[201] 555-0123'. Below the input field is a checkbox with the following text: 'By providing your phone number, you accept the Terms of Service & Privacy Policy to receive promotional or marketing related text messages. Consent is not a condition of purchase. Message and data rates may apply. Message frequency varies. Reply HELP for help or STOP to opt out.' At the bottom of the form is a blue button labeled 'Continue' with a circular arrow icon to its right. The entire form is set against a light blue background with a dark blue footer bar containing three icons: a phone, a checkmark, and a speech bubble.

Short code sign-ups (Direct opt-in)

Campaigns across all channels solicit non-subscribers to sign-up for targeted campaigns

Subscriber sign-up

All new subscribers who subscribe online (72% of new starts) are presented with check box to opt-in to SMS messaging

Customer Service

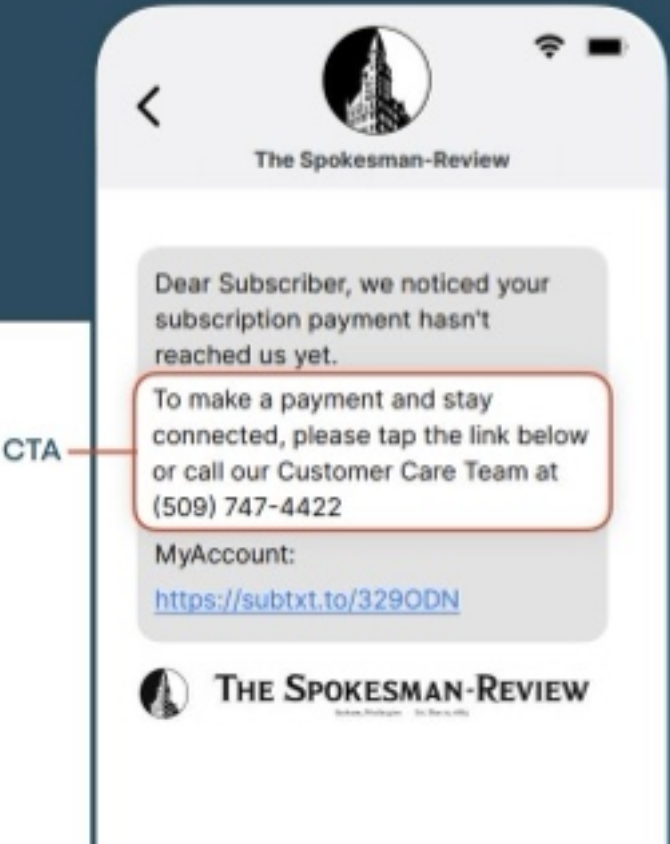
Customers can opt-in to specific campaigns by requesting addition via reps

QR Codes!

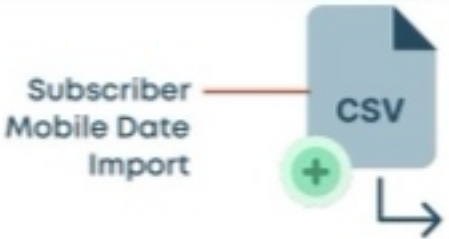
Our Very First Test

Retention Channel - The Spokesman Review

The Spokesman Review launched an SMS retention campaign that imported subscriber mobile data weekly to identify soon-to-lapse readers and re-engage them with timely text messages before their accounts expired.



CSV Import				
Name	Phone Number	Email	Signup Date	Signup Method
Darlene Roberts	(359) 549-0016	drobert@gmail	2025-5-19	Imported CSV
Dianne Russell	(853) 653-9888	dianne33@gmail	2025-5-19	Import
Chris Watson	(886) 293-6223	c.watson.90@aol	2025-5-22	Import
Theresa Webb	(607) 588-0458	theresa@yahoo	2025-5-22	Import

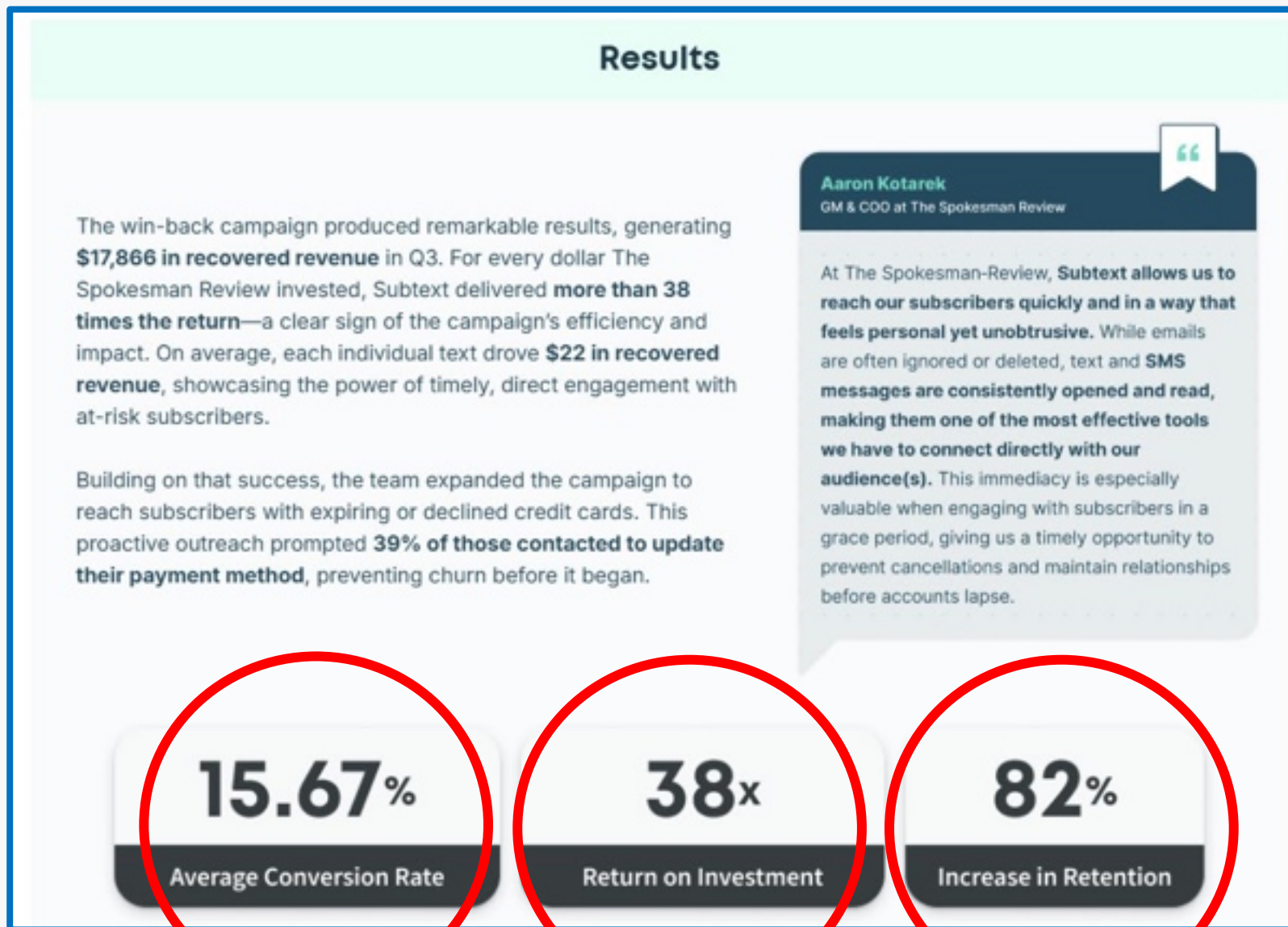


Campaign Subscribers		745 Subscribers
Darlene Roberts	(359) 549-0016	
Dianne Russell	(853) 653-9888	
Chris Watson	(886) 293-6223	
Theresa Webb	(607) 588-0458	

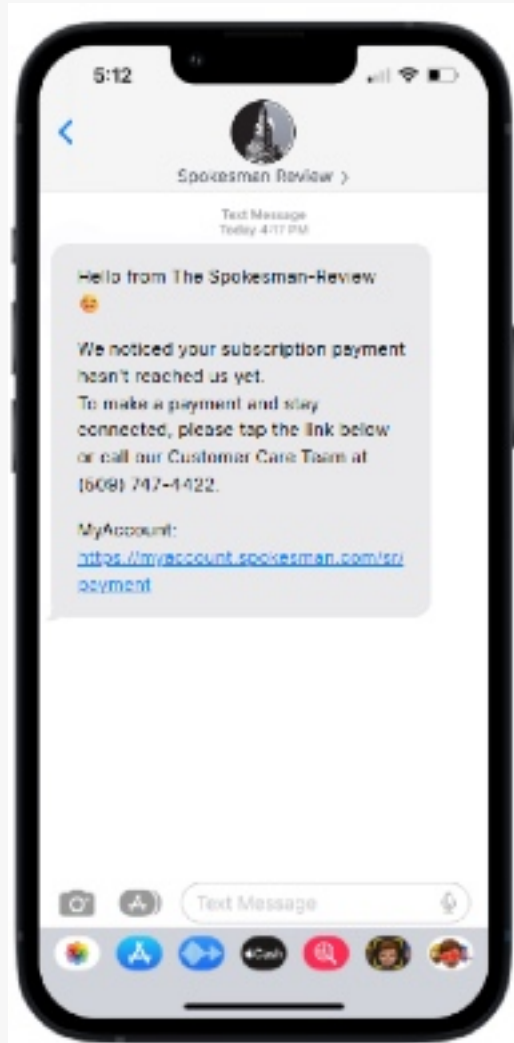
Our Very First Test

1. **CONVERSION!**
2. **ROI!**
3. **RETENTION!**

Prior to using Subtext, our digital subscriptions that were being terminated due to missed or failed payments had a 91.42%+ churn rate....a costly drop-off in both audience engagement and recurring revenue.



RED ZONE GRACE MESSAGING



Targets

Users within their last 7 days of Grace – The **RED ZONE**

Message

A reminder that they haven't made a payment.
Intentional inclusion of branded link and direct phone number

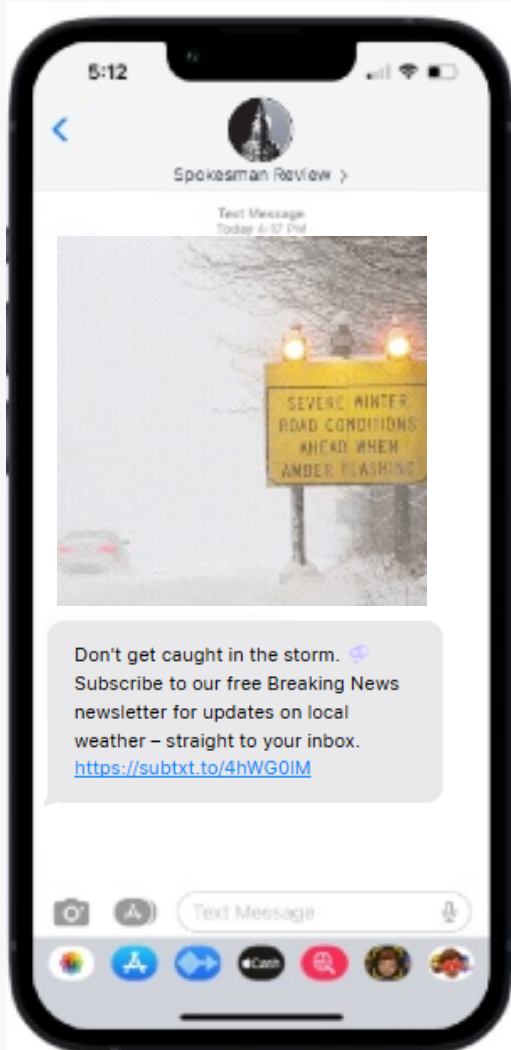
Outcomes

Collected **22.42%** of payments

Saved **27.55%** of potentially lost revenue

Received over **\$100k** in payments collected in just 7 months

NEWSLETTER GROWTH MESSAGING



Targets

Subscribers not on a newsletter list

Message

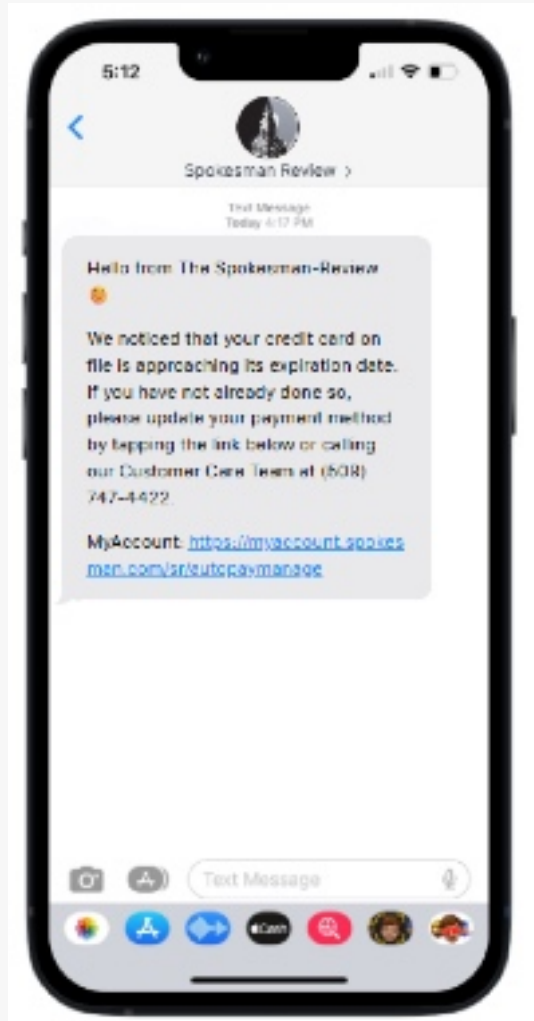
Gif and catchy message to attract sign ups.

Outcomes

1.9% Clickthrough rate

.07% Conversion rate

CREDIT CARD EXPIRATION MESSAGING



Targets

Subscribers with a payment method expiring in the next 28 days.

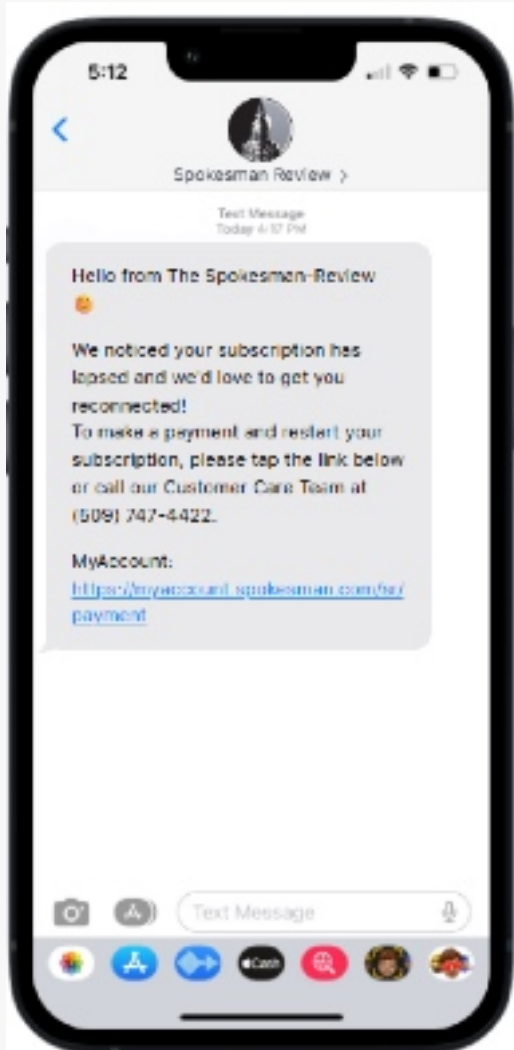
Message

A reminder to update their credit card before expiring and losing access.

Outcomes

39% of contacts updated payment method
Retain average of **\$2.6k** in revenue per week

WINBACK MESSAGING



Targets

Subscribers who have stopped due to non-pay in the last 7-15 days

Message

Friendly note that their account has expired.

Outcomes

14% of contacts restarted

Reactivated over **\$20k** in recurring weekly revenue

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DINING DEALS

*Delicious Deals.
Delivered.*

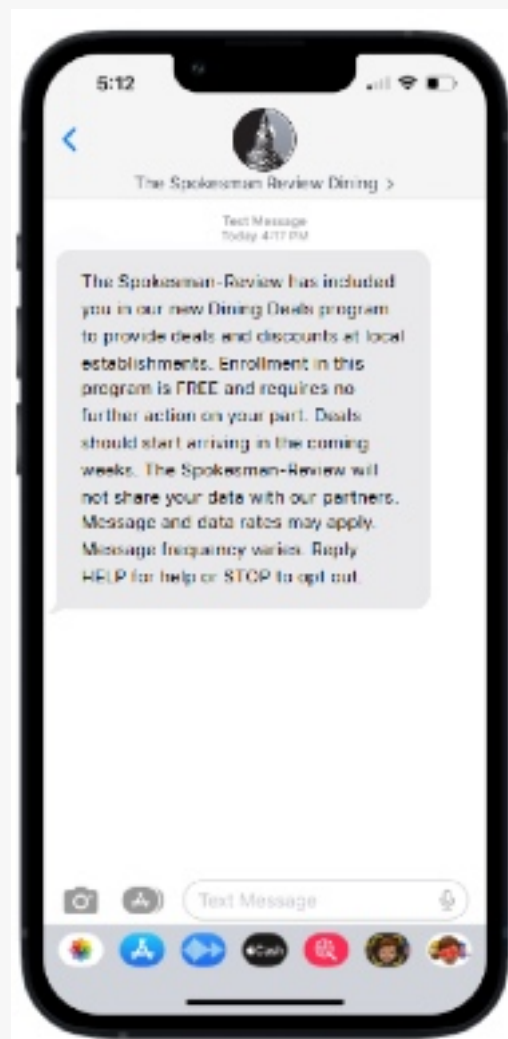
*Exclusive dining offers, straight to your phone.
Discover new local favorites & save on every bite.*

**JOIN THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW'S
DINING DEALS TODAY**

Spokesman.com/diningdeals



ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES



Spokesman Review - Dining

The Spokesman Review Dining offers [Privacy Policy](#) / [Terms of Service](#)

Subscribe for FREE

MOBILE NUMBER

🇺🇸 (201) 555-0123

☐ By providing your phone number, you accept the Terms of Service & Privacy Policy to receive promotional or marketing related text messages. Consent is not a condition of purchase. Message and data rates may apply. Message frequency varies. Reply HELP for help or STOP to opt out.

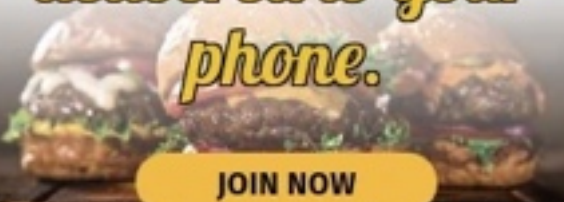
Continue

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*Delicious deals
delivered to your
phone.*



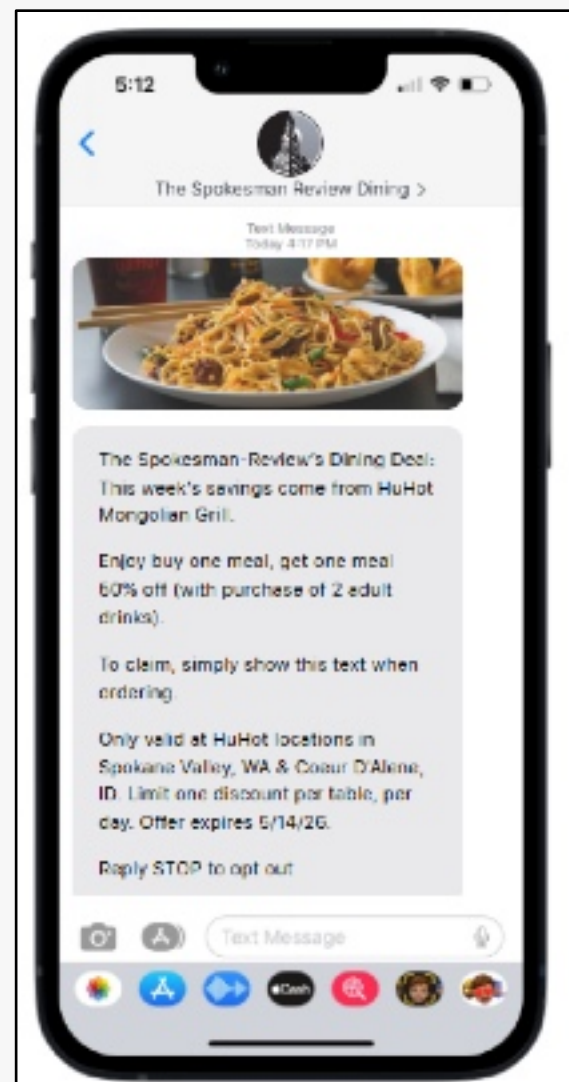
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*Delicious deals
delivered to your
phone.*

JOIN NOW



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***Delicious Deals:
Delivered!***

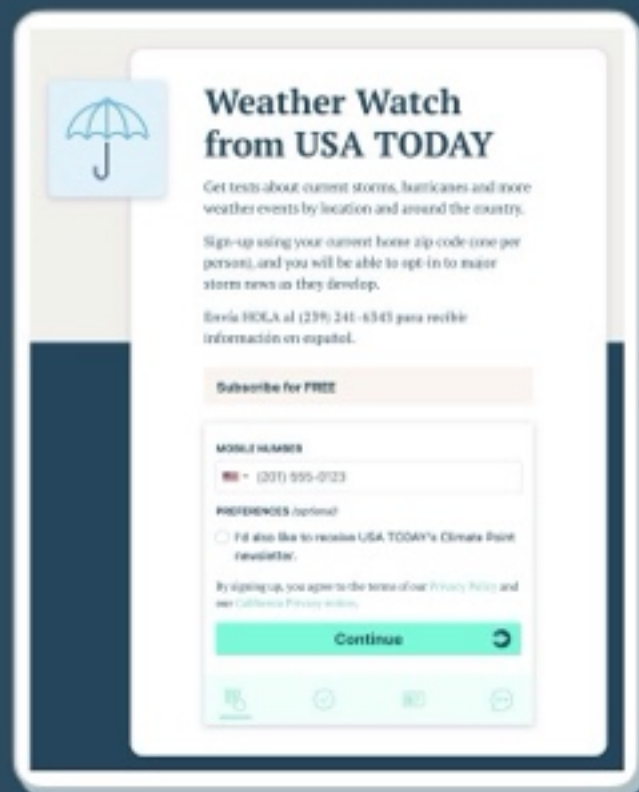
JOIN NOW

Exclusive dining offers, straight to your phone.
**JOIN THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW'S
DINING DEALS TODAY**

Engagement Channel - Weather Alerts from USA Today

USA Today launched a mobile-first SMS weather-alert campaign to keep readers informed on major storms and hurricanes. By using ZIP-code sign-ups, the service delivers geo-targeted texts with real-time updates specific to each subscriber's location.

Subscriber Segmentation



Weather Watch from USA TODAY

Get texts about current storms, hurricanes and more weather events by location and around the country.

Sign-up using your current home zip code (one per person), and you will be able to opt-in to major storm news as they develop.

Envía HOOLA al (239) 241-6343 para recibir información en español.

Subscribe for FREE

MOBILE NUMBER

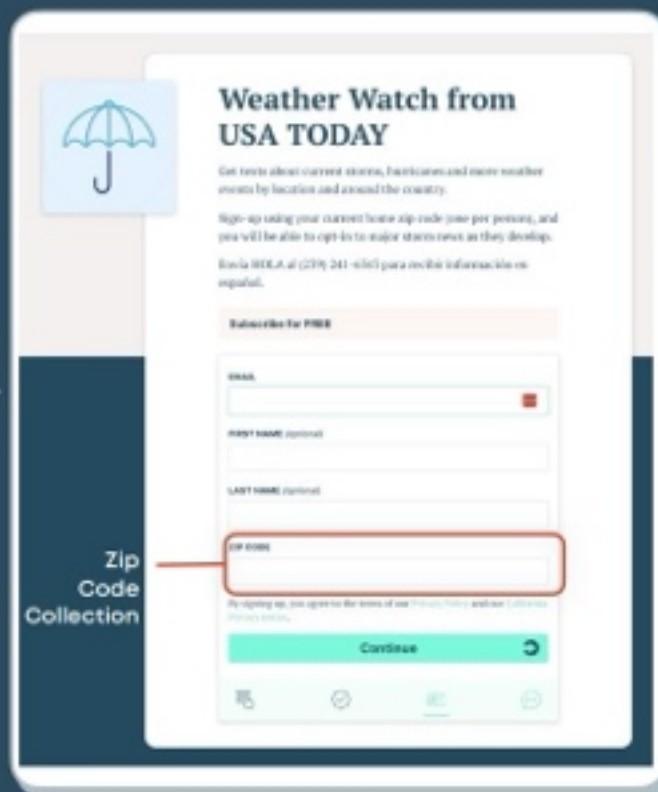
PREFERENCES (optional)

☐ I'd also like to receive USA TODAY's Climate Point newsletter.

By signing up, you agree to the terms of our Privacy Policy and our California Privacy notice.

Continue

Subscriber Sign Up



Weather Watch from USA TODAY

Get texts about current storms, hurricanes and more weather events by location and around the country.

Sign-up using your current home zip code (one per person), and you will be able to opt-in to major storm news as they develop.

Envía HOOLA al (239) 241-6343 para recibir información en español.

Subscribe for FREE

EMAIL

FIRST NAME (optional)

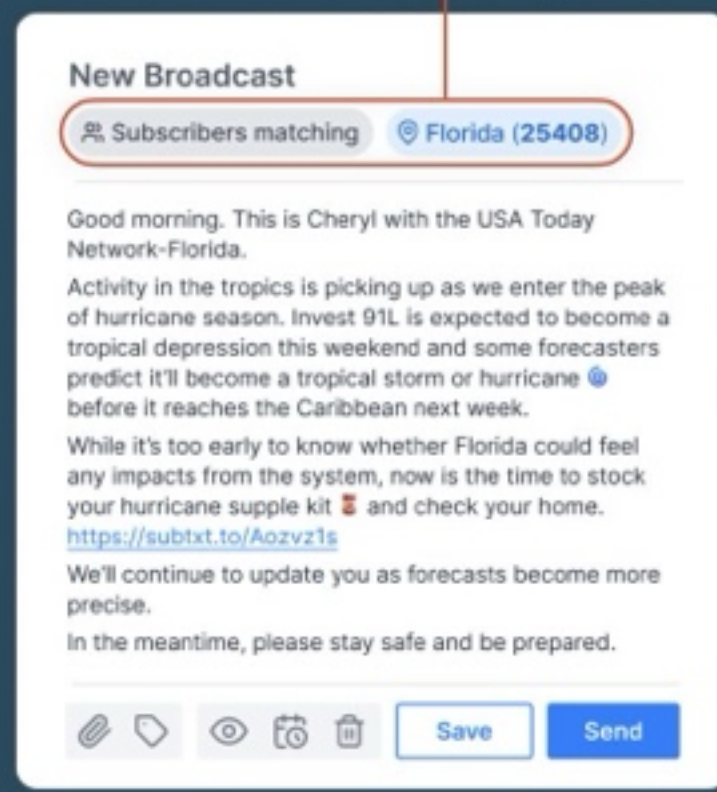
LAST NAME (optional)

ZIP CODE

By signing up, you agree to the terms of our Privacy Policy and our California Privacy notice.

Continue

Subscriber Sign Up



New Broadcast

👤 Subscribers matching **📍 Florida (25408)**

Good morning. This is Cheryl with the USA Today Network-Florida.

Activity in the tropics is picking up as we enter the peak of hurricane season. Invest 91L is expected to become a tropical depression this weekend and some forecasters predict it'll become a tropical storm or hurricane 🌀 before it reaches the Caribbean next week.

While it's too early to know whether Florida could feel any impacts from the system, now is the time to stock your hurricane supply kit 🧰 and check your home. <https://subtxt.to/Aozvz1s>

We'll continue to update you as forecasts become more precise.

In the meantime, please stay safe and be prepared.

Save **Send**

Text Composer

Publisher Use Case Examples

Audience / Marketing

- Drive Print Subscriptions via Single Copy FSI with QR Code Offer (*WEHCO*)
- Podcast Subscriptions (*LockedOn*)
- Niche Interest Subscriptions (*NYTimes Cooking*)
- Push Relevant Content to Paywall and Subscription Offer (*USA Today*)
- Contests

News

- Breaking News
- Political Content
- News Tips / "Nosey Neighbor"
- Event Promotion
- Weather Alerts for Tornadoes, Hurricanes, etc. (*Gannett*)
- HS Sports Scores & Photo Submission (e.g. "HS Sports Photo of the Week")

Advertising

- Event Promotion
- Ticket Sales
- E-Commerce
- Education
- Home Services
- Travel
- Political
- Auto Sales
- Auto Services
- Auctions
- "Best of"
- Donors
- QSR
- Loyalty Programs



UPCOMING TESTS

Acquisition

Direct Mail follow up
Content targeted CTA

Retention

Disengaged Users
Digital Activation
Digital Zombies

Newsroom

Two-way conversations (Newsroom)
Breaking News Alerts
Newsletter mobile delivery

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

- Solicit Philanthropic Donations
- Credit Card Expirations-Declines
- Convert to EZ Pay
- Breaking News Alerts
- Newsletter Distribution
- Download/Authenticate the App
- Delivery of Ads/Coupons
- Promotion of Events





CONCLUSION: HARNESSING SMS TO TRANSFORM AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND SUBSCRIPTION SUCCESS

Boosting Audience Engagement

SMS channels provide direct communication, increasing reader interaction and engagement effectively.

Enhancing Subscription Renewals

Automated SMS reminders help improve subscription renewals and customer retention rates.

Driving Advertising Opportunities

SMS marketing opens new avenues for targeted advertising and revenue growth for publishers.

Leveraging Data-Driven Strategies

Data analytics integrated with SMS allows publishers to tailor content and maximize impact.

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“If you are not
networking, you
are not working!”

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