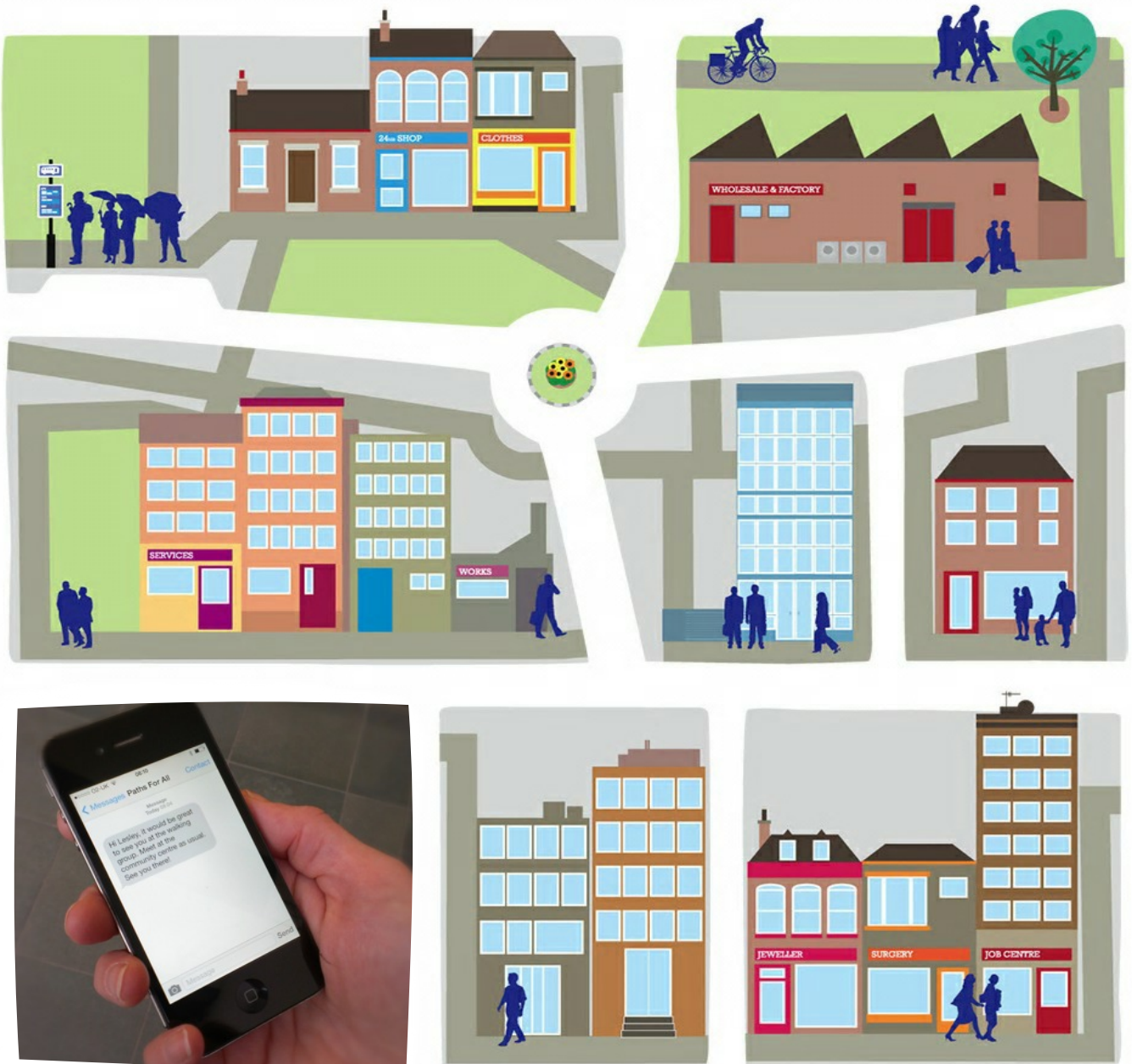


Guidance Note

8 Using Text Messages to Motivate Walkers

paths
for all





Introduction

In the UK 94% of adults now have access to a mobile phone¹. Mobile phone technologies are readily available, easily accessible and can be a powerful tool to increase communication and encourage people to become and stay physically active. Text messages, also known as short messaging services (SMS), in particular have been shown to be a popular and effective delivery channel in the management of chronic disease², addictions³ and weight⁴.

Text messages can be used in a number of ways to promote walking. For example, a text message could provide information on an upcoming walking event or act as a reminder of the benefits of walking for health.

This guidance note highlights the different ways in which text messages can inform and engage individuals within walking groups and how to implement a text message service.

References

1. The Communication Market 2013, OFCOM
2. Franklin et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2006; Miloh et al., 2009
3. Rodgers et al., 2005
4. Patrick et al., 2009

Using Text Messages in Your Project

Figure 1 shows how text messages can be used within your project to promote physical activity and engage new and existing walkers. Also highlighted in Figure 1 are additional uses of this service for monitoring walking projects.

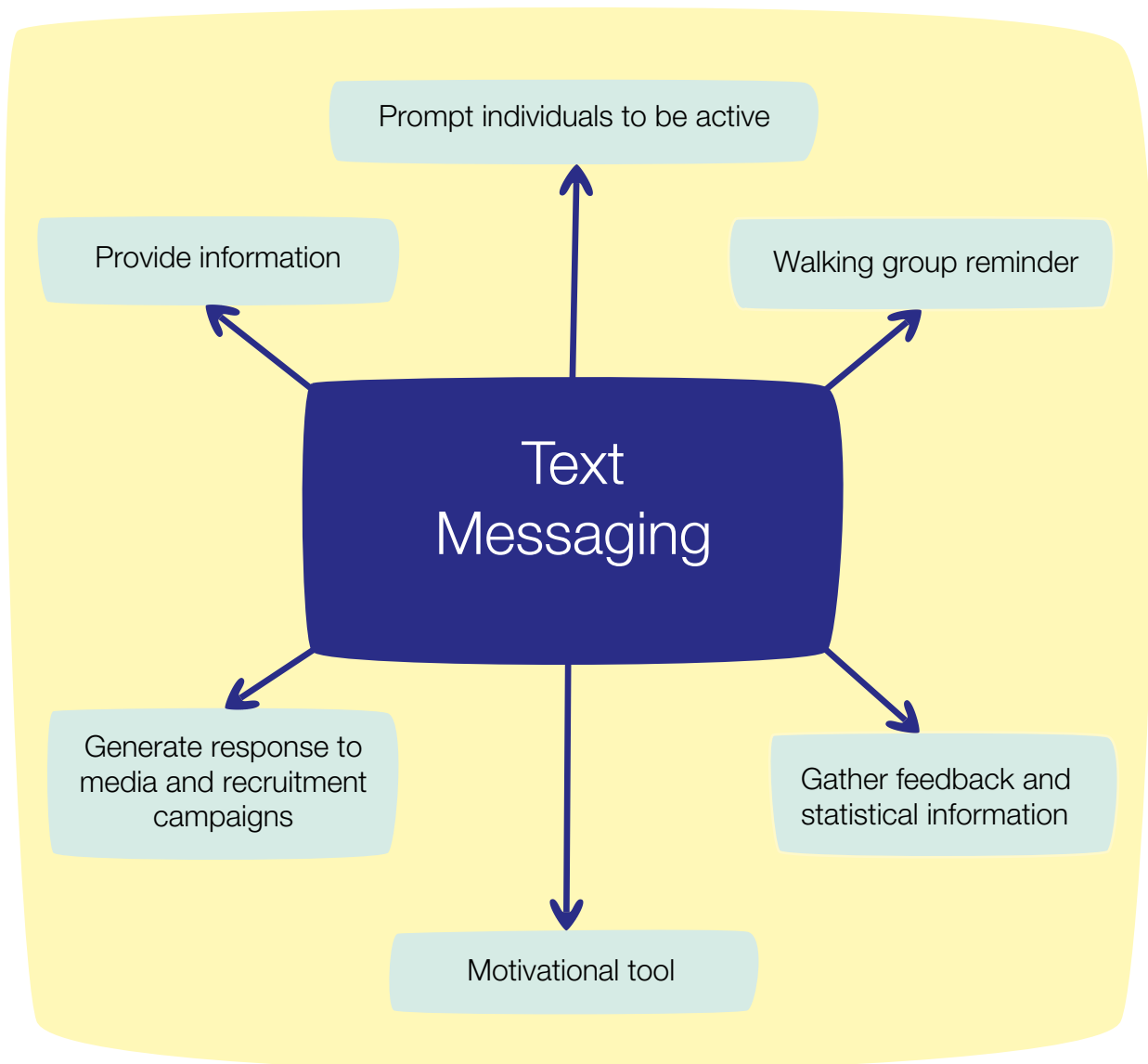


Figure 1 Application of text messaging to promote physical activity and engage walkers

Targeting Your Text Messages

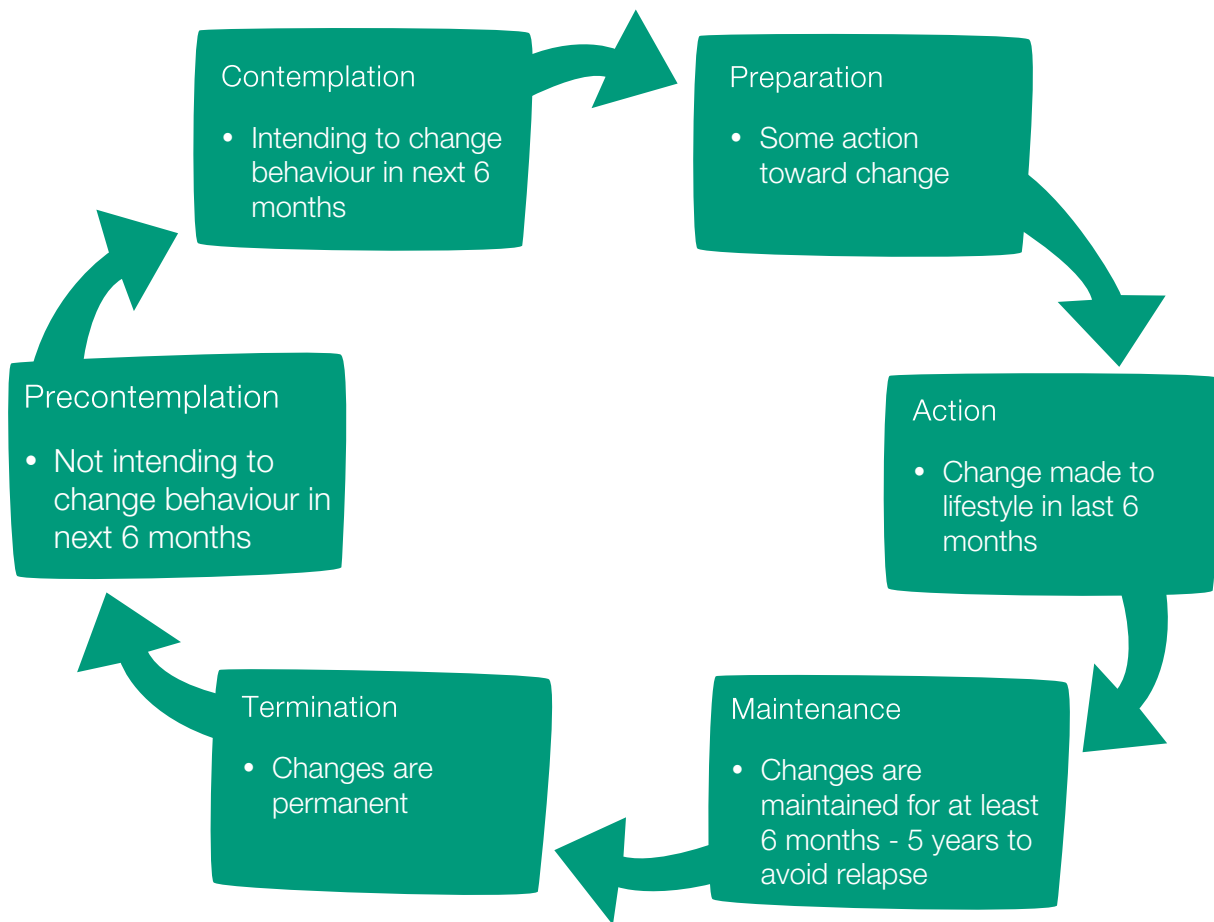


Figure 2 Six Stages of Behaviour Change

Research shows that using text messages to promote physical activity is most effective if the messages are targeted at the individuals most motivated to change and the message content is tailored to their needs.

This research is based on the Transtheoretical Model of Health Behaviour Change¹ (TTM). The TTM captures individuals' motivation levels to change behaviour in six key stages (see figure 2 above).

Messages targeted and tailored to the needs of walkers who are intending to change behaviour (contemplation stage) and those who have taken some action towards changing (preparation stage) are most likely to respond positively.

However, individuals are likely to move through the stages in a cyclical manner and can relapse back to an earlier stage before permanently changing behaviour and becoming physically active. Therefore, SMS text messages are still useful for individuals at each stage if they are tailored correctly.

For example, individuals who are regular walkers (those in the maintenance stage) may respond to a text message regarding an upcoming walking event or be happy to provide feedback regarding their walking activity.

References

1. Prochaska et al., 1997

Building a Bank of Messages

When building a bank of messages it is important to understand how the content of the messages you send may be perceived and influence behaviour. Behaviour change arises from a combination of components; capability, opportunity and motivation, as illustrated in figure 3.

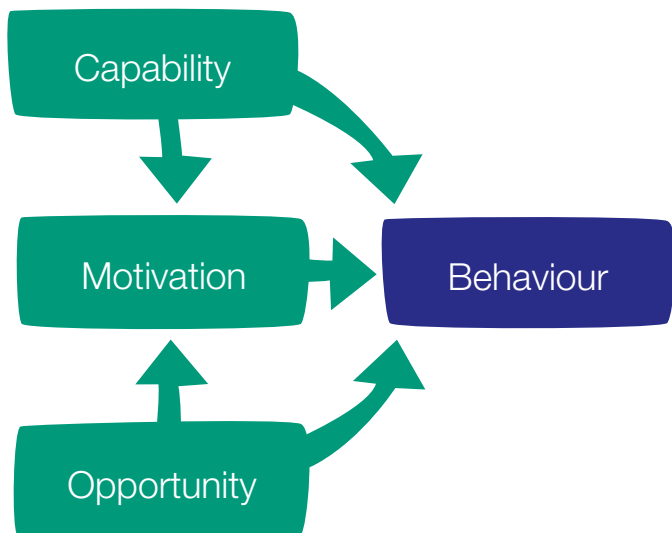


Figure 3 Framework to understand behaviour (Mechie et al, 2011)

Keep this framework in mind when you are creating your message bank. To maximise the impact of your text messages you'll need to provide a combination of these three factors. For example:

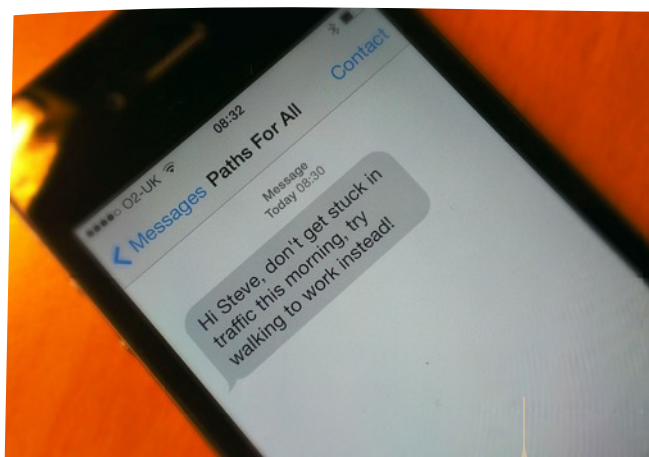
1. The person needs to feel that they are capable of the activity (e.g. 'Our walks are short, friendly and at your pace')
2. They need to have the opportunity to take part in that activity (e.g. 'Join us for a short walk round the park this Thursday')
3. Add general motivational messages (e.g. 'Walking is the best form of preventative medicine')

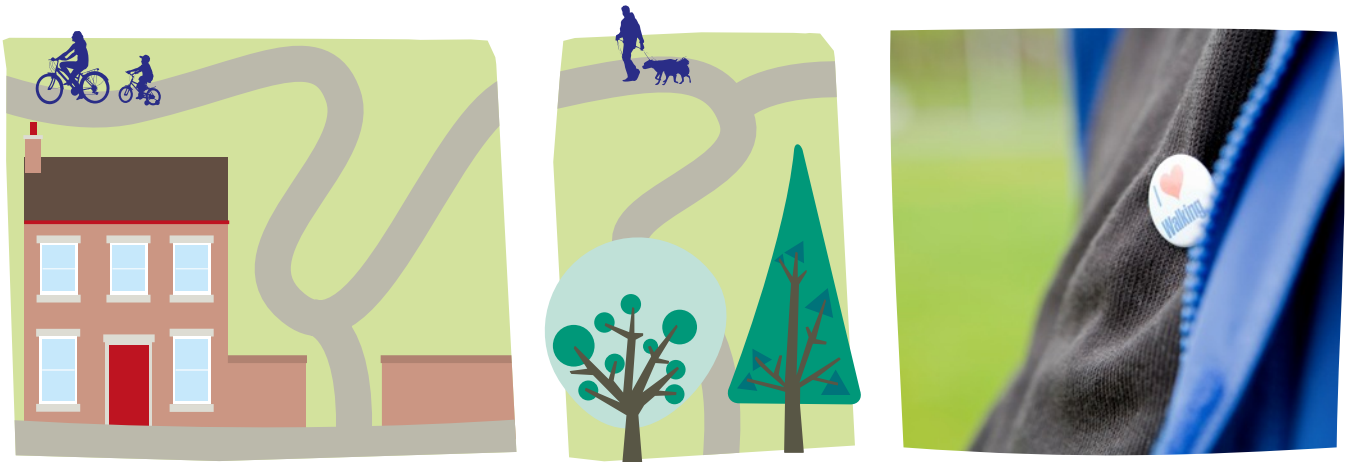
Research suggests¹ that using these elements increases the impact of the messages and is more likely to change behaviour and increase physical activity.

However, a person's stage of behaviour change will influence the balance of the messages sent. For example, a regular walker may only require a message regarding an additional walking opportunity such as a special event or activity. A new walker may require the support from all three components of the framework.

References

1. Mutsuddi and Connelly, 2012





Message Examples

Below are some examples of the type of message that may fall under the components (capability, opportunity and motivation) of the framework shown in Figure 3.

Capability

- Start small and walk at your own pace, every step counts
- Share your experience, bring a friend along to the walk
- Small steps make a big difference

Opportunity

- Walking group meets at town hall on a Monday at 7pm
- Your local health walk now leaves from the community centre on a Wednesday at 1.30pm and Friday at 3pm
- Lunch time walks can improve productivity

Motivation

- Don't get stuck in the traffic this morning walk to work
- No matter what speed you walk at you are still lapping everyone on the couch
- Walking is the most ancient exercise yet still the best modern exercise

Data Protection

Before a walker receives any text messages from you, Data Protection legislation states that each person must opt in to receive texts. This may have been with a tick box on a form, email or website application from which you took their name and contact details. A statement such as "I agree that ABC Walking Project can contact me by text with messages that promote walking" is sufficient. If you have not obtained their consent, you must do so before texting them.

Other considerations

- Here are some other considerations you may wish to make when sending SMS text messages to walkers.
- The timing of messages has been shown to increase their persuasive nature¹.
 - The frequency of the messages received is also an important consideration and may be based on an individual's needs or level of support required.
 - You may also wish to consider increasing SMS contact during the winter months (seasonal prompts). Feedback from walkers suggests that they may need or like more support and encouragement to be active during the winter Months.

References

1. Mutsuddi and Connelly, 2012

How to implement a text messaging service

Choosing a provider

There are a number of SMS providers and 'gateways' that these providers can use to access mobile networks within the UK. A list of the some providers and key features can be found in Table 1 below. All the providers listed can be accessed through the internet and you do not require a

mobile phone contract to use them. When choosing a provider it is important to check that the provider platform can support the most basic tools to enable you to communicate and motivate new and existing walkers.

Table 1 SMS providers and some key features offered

Provider	Free trial	Free reply	Free unsubscribe	Do credits expire?	Long + short codes	Personalised message
Textmarketer	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
2 SMS (.com)	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Boom SMS	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Bulk SMS	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Clickatell	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Clickatell	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Esendex	✓	✗	✗	-	✓	✓
Fast SMS	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Glover Sure	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Intelli Software	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Intelli SMS	✓	✗	✗	-	✓	✗
Kapow	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Mediaburst	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Red SMS	✓	✗	✓	-	✓	✗
SMS2 Email	✓	✓	✗	-	✓	✗
Text anywhere	✓	✓	✗	-	✓	✗
Text magic	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Textvertising	✓	✗	✓			
Text local	✓	✗				

* Please note that information on this table is subject to change as the providers may change the service they offer over time

Key features of an SMS platform

Here are some of the key features you should you look out for when choosing an SMS provider:

Clear costing

- Is there a set up fee?
- What are the billing options (pay as you go, invoiced, pre paid credit)?
- What is the cost per text? Most providers work with credits, 1 credit = a 160 character text, sending a longer text will result in you being charged 2 or more credits
- Do text credits expire?
- What is the cost of short codes, long codes and keywords (is there a min contract or minimum period)?

Short codes

- A short code is a 5 digit number which works with keywords. Short codes allow you to capture information, contact details and generate text responses (e.g. from recruitment campaigns or feedback from walkers)

Keywords

- A keyword is a trigger for the provider platform to either group incoming texts (e.g. different keyword for different projects etc) or respond to incoming text messages (auto response).
- Two main types of keywords
- Standard keywords are any word that you wish (e.g. PATHSFORALL) and are more expensive than value keywords which start with a number (e.g. 2PATHSFORALL)

Long code, virtual mobile number or TXT us number

- A long code is basically a mobile number that can receive incoming messages but not calls
- No keywords are required
- Allow walkers to reply to your messages or text you directly with enquires

Free unsubscribe tool

- A Stop code which allows walkers to opt out or unsubscribe to being sent text messages
- Sender ID
- Allows recipient to see who the text message is from e.g. Paths for all

Delivery report

- Allow you to see if the text messages sent were successfully delivered

Schedule sender

- Allow you to plan and set the day and time you would like the text messages to be sent to your walkers

Support

- Does the provider have a support system in place to help with any problem that may arise?

Auto responder

- The system automatically sends a reply message to a key word
- Auto response texts only work with a key word e.g. WALK on a short code number e.g. 88802

Message library

- Allows you to create, store and catalogue your messages

Analytics

- Provides analysis of your service use and be simple and easy to use

Information on data storage and data protection

- Does the provider, give clear information on how the data is stored?
- Level of security
- Password protected

A good SMS platform will also feature:

- The ability to personalise messages
- Allows you to merge data like walkers first name so that tailored messages can be sent to each walker without sending the message individually



Case Study: The Organisation for Nepalese Culture and Welfare

The Nepalese community health walk group in Aberdeen, run by the Organisation for Nepalese Culture and Welfare (ONCW), carried out a pilot to communicate with their walkers using text messages. Paths for All awarded Small Grant funding for the project, which used Paths for All's Guidance Note 8: Using Text Messages to Motivate Walkers.

The Organisation used a text messaging service to provide health walk reminders and updates to their walkers, and found it was particularly effective for last minute communications, such as walk cancellations due to bad weather. Participants said they preferred receiving text messages to email reminders, and some felt that text messaging was better than email or Facebook updates as it was easier to miss email and Facebook updates.

As the pilot was successful, the Organisation is continuing to use text messaging to communicate with its walkers, alongside its Facebook page where it regularly posts health walk updates and photos.

There are 8 Paths for All Guidance Notes in this series:

1. The Case For Walking
2. Planning Your Project
3. Working With Volunteers
4. Monitoring & Evaluation
5. Marketing & Promotion
6. Moving On
7. Recruitment
8. Using Text Messages to Motivate Walkers



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