



Amidst all the ‘marketing noise’ generated by the retail trade, it’s often easy to lose sight of why people visit particular stores. There’s a reason why the independent retail trade in this country is booming – consumers value the community aspect of their local store, and provided they are given incentives to return, they are all-too willing to remain loyal. But how to ensure that a particular store’s message is reaching its target base? The answer could lie in the device resting in that customer’s pocket.

InteractSMS was established in 2009 by Phonovation, Ireland’s largest and most successful automated voice and SMS provider, in response to demand for a targeted approach to SMS marketing that could deliver actionable information to clients and customers, and drive a business’ sales.

Message Sent

SMS marketing used to be a scattergun format; send out as many texts as possible and hope for the best. However, as Gavin Carpenter, sales director at InteractSMS explains, the market has now evolved significantly - leading to more targeted marketing opportunities and increased sales.

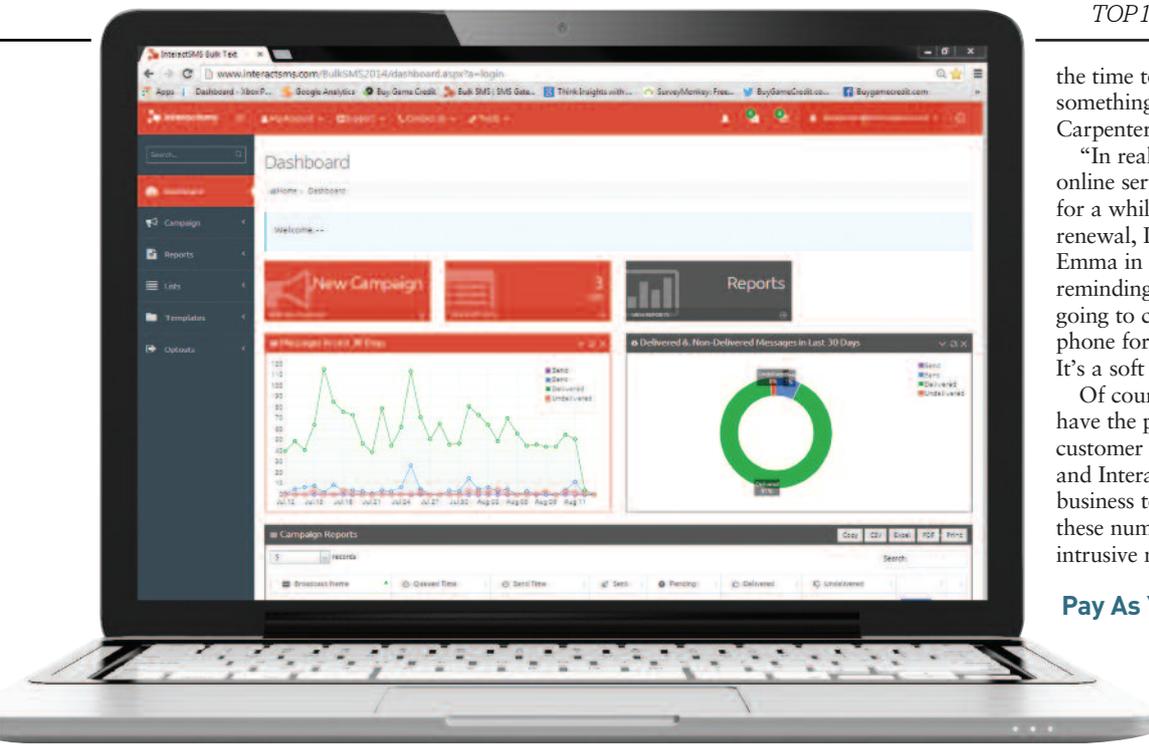
“We wanted to bring SMS marketing forward, from the traditional ‘blunderbuss’ approach – sending out thousands of messages and hoping they hit the mark – to something that was a lot more targeted, and easy to use,” says Gavin Carpenter, sales director at InteractSMS. “It was a part of the market that wasn’t being catered for. Within one year, from a standing start, we had delivered €1.2 million in sales, and the companies we engaged with were seeing better-than-expected results. So we knew we had a product with potential.”

Drive Footfall

Carpenter describes InteractSMS as offering a “trigger: giving people a reason to shop in a particular store, or reminding them why they need to return”, and in an industry where driving footfall, and therefore sales, is all important, it can represent a valuable ally.

“You might have a loyal customer base in a certain area, but something happens – competition from a rival intensifies or new stores open in the area – and you lose some of that custom,” he explains. “You might invest in printed leaflets, but as soon as they arrive in a customer’s door, they go straight in the bin.

“What you need is a way to target your customer base in a way that’s not intrusive, and remind them why they should come back: something as simple as ‘Hi Gavin, Don’t forget you have €11 worth of vouchers on your loyalty card this weekend. Thanks for shopping with us’. It’s short, it’s simple, and it’s on my phone, which is on my person at all times. Sometimes that’s all



Open for Business: Left: Gavin Carpenter, sales director, InteractSMS. Above: The digital interface available to users is easy-to-use and offers the ability to track and measure the success of a campaign

you need to drive footfall, and at a fraction of the cost of other marketing ventures.”

Getting The Message Right

InteractSMS prides itself on the fact that in five years of operation it has received no data protection complaints, and with good reason – the company sits down with clients prior to using the service and outlines how to effectively market using SMS, examining the key themes and messages that resonate most with customers, and how to phrase messages accordingly.

“By working with us, we can ensure that all messages sent out by your business are relevant and reliable,” says Carpenter. “If you want to engage your customer, you need to think outside of ‘Come and shop with us this weekend’, or ‘Look at the value in-store’. Those messages can often frustrate, or alienate your customer base. All messages need to have some sort of specific relevance to the customer.

“If I’m a red wine drinker, or specifically an Australian Shiraz drinker, I don’t want messages that are offering me Italian whites. Similarly, messages offering 5% off a car wash are no good to me if I don’t have a car. We can help business with ensuring that their messaging has real value, and is personalised as much as possible.”

For example, InteractSMS works extensively with waste management companies, who remind customers via text to ‘leave their bins out tomorrow’. “When a customer receives that message, they don’t see it as marketing; they see it as a service or utility that they need to keep on top of. But every time they do leave out the bin, that’s another €6.95 pickup charge for the waste management company –

“Phonovation have helped us with every aspect of our SMS requirements and we couldn’t be happier with the service provided to help us with our marketing campaigns. Their customer service is second to none.”

Gabriela Magurean, Apache Pizza Kells

it’s another sale. Customers may not see it as marketing, but businesses definitely do.”

Other services offered by InteractSMS include security authorisation, delivery scheduling, debt collection, enquiry handling, event updates and appointment making. Between 1 and 1 million messages can be sent in a single mailout, live responses can be tracked as they happen, messages can be sent instantly or ‘sent later’ – the versatility of the system can facilitate even the most elaborate of marketing campaigns. The amount of engagement you make with the service, and therefore with your customers, is entirely up to you.

Personal Touch

The level of personalisation offered by InteractSMS is also far more targeted than that offered by other marketing channels, again at a fraction of the cost. “If I get a text, addressed to me, offering something that is best suited to me, and signed by the store manager, I think ‘wow, this person has taken

the time to write to me, personally, about something he or she knows I need’,” says Carpenter.

“In reality, it’s all automated, using our online service. If I haven’t been to the dentist for a while, or my insurance policy is up for renewal, I might get a personal message from Emma in reception or John in accounts reminding me to give them a call. Nobody is going to call to your door or hold you on the phone for 20 minutes trying to make a sale. It’s a soft sell, and it works.”

Of course, not all businesses are going to have the personal phone numbers of their customer base – some may have very few – and InteractSMS will work closely with a business to ensure that they are able to source these numbers in a fully-acceptable, non-intrusive manner.

Pay As You Go

Unlike other service providers, InteractSMS offers a ‘pay as you go’ model, meaning there is no minimum requirement to how many messages you can send;

while a nationwide chain may send out thousands of messages, a smaller business may seek to target dozens. In addition, there are no software or hardware charges associated with the service; it’s simply a case of logging in at interactsms.com and using the easy-to-use interface to engage with your customers, as and when you please.

While traditional marketing channels offer businesses the opportunity to market products or services on a grand scale, such platforms often come with a cost, and offer limited ability to tell whether a business’ target customer has been ‘engaged’. Not so with SMS. “5,000 messages cost just €200, which is a small outlay for such a targeted approach,” says Carpenter. “That’s a chance to engage with 5,000 customers, that have bought with you before, and may well do so again, with offers that are relevant to them.

“We work with Dobbins restaurant in Dublin, and they might send out 250 messages offering a deal on a Tuesday, and receive ten bookings. That doesn’t seem like a great return, but when you consider those 250 messages cost the restaurant less than €20 to send, and they have made around €1,000 from the exercise, it doesn’t take a genius to realise it’s a very cost-effective means to engage with your customer base.”

Looking to capitalise on a major event happening in your town at the weekend, a promotional offer unique to your store only, or a sunny spell of weather on the horizon? With InteractSMS you can target your customer base instantly, and cost-effectively – at a time that suits you.