How to plan SMS promotions that don't overwhelm your subscribers

Text message marketing is powerful because it lands directly in someone's pocket. That same directness can backfire if messages arrive too often or without purpose. A well-planned SMS promotion respects the recipient's attention while still driving results. The key is structure: a clear schedule, relevant offers, and a way for people to control what they receive.

Start with a campaign schedule

Before you send a single message, map out the timing. A campaign schedule keeps promotions predictable for both you and your subscribers. Decide how many texts you will send in a given period - weekly, biweekly, or monthly - and stick to it. The schedule should also account for the promotion's lifecycle: an announcement, a reminder, and a last-chance message. Spreading these out prevents the feeling of being bombarded.

One thing to watch is the spacing between messages. If you send a reminder too soon after the announcement, it reads as urgency; send it too late and people forget. A good rule is to leave at least three days between each touchpoint. Also consider the time of day. Mid-morning or early afternoon on weekdays tend to work well, while late evenings or weekends can feel intrusive.

Your schedule should also include a plan for the promotion's end. A single "offer expires tomorrow" message is fine, but avoid sending multiple countdown texts. That approach often triggers opt-outs.

Define your audience segment

Not every subscriber needs every promotion. An audience segment lets you send the right offer to the right people. Start by grouping subscribers based on past behavior: frequent buyers, lapsed customers, or those who only signed up for appointment reminders. Each group has a different tolerance for promotional messages.

For example, someone who joined your list for order updates may unsubscribe if they start receiving weekly discount codes. Meanwhile, a subscriber who clicked on a previous promotional link likely expects more of the same. The trick is to match the message frequency to each segment's expectations. You can even ask subscribers to set their own preferences during sign-up - how often they want to hear about promotions, and what type of offers interest them.

What to watch: avoid over-segmenting to the point where you have too few people in each group. A segment should be large enough to justify the effort of a separate message. Also review segments regularly, as subscriber behavior changes over time.

Choose a relevant promotional offer

The offer itself decides whether the message feels welcome or like spam. A promotional offer should be genuinely useful to the segment receiving it. A discount code for a product category the subscriber has bought before works well. A generic "10% off everything" may work for a broad audience but can feel lazy to someone who only buys one type of item.

Make the offer clear and easy to redeem. Include a call to action that tells the reader exactly what to do: "Reply YES to claim your code" or "Tap the link to shop." Avoid vague language like "Learn more" that leaves the reader guessing. The call to action should match the channel - since SMS is quick and personal, the response should feel equally immediate.

One common mistake is making the offer too complex. If the subscriber has to visit a website, enter a code, and then meet a minimum spend, the friction can kill the conversion rate. Keep the path short. A simple discount code that auto-applies at checkout works better than a multi-step process.

SMS marketing campaigns succeed when the offer feels like a benefit, not a chore. If the promotion requires too much effort, subscribers will ignore it or opt out.

Set message frequency limits

Message frequency is the most common reason people unsubscribe from business text messaging. Setting hard limits per week or per month protects your list. Most platforms let you cap how many messages a subscriber can receive in a given period. Use that feature.

For a single promotion, two to three messages is usually enough. For ongoing promotions, consider a weekly digest instead of separate texts for every new offer. The digest groups multiple deals into one message, reducing the overall count while still delivering value.

What to watch: be transparent about frequency during sign-up. Tell subscribers how many messages to expect per month. If you later change the frequency, ask permission first. A sudden jump from two messages a month to two a week will drive opt-outs.

Also monitor the opt-out rate after each campaign. If you see a spike, dial back the frequency or rethink the offer. A high opt-out rate signals that the audience feels overwhelmed, even if the schedule looked reasonable on paper.

Use a custom sender to build trust

A custom sender - a recognizable name or short code instead of a random number - makes your message look legitimate. People are more likely to open a text from a name they know. It also reduces the chance that your promotion gets reported as spam.

Choose a sender name that matches your brand and stays consistent across campaigns. Avoid changing it frequently, as that confuses subscribers. If your platform supports it, also include a way for recipients to reply directly. A two-way conversation builds trust and gives you feedback on the promotion's reception.

One thing to watch: some custom senders have character limits or require approval from carriers. Test your sender before the campaign goes live to make sure messages deliver correctly.

Test then send

Before sending to your full list, test the message on a small group. Check that the discount code works, the link goes to the right page, and the message displays correctly on different devices. A broken link or expired code destroys the promotion's credibility and frustrates subscribers.

Testing also lets you gauge the message's tone. Read it aloud. Does it sound natural, or does it read like a template? Adjust the wording until it sounds like a person texting a friend. That conversational feel is what makes SMS feel personal rather than automated.

After the campaign runs, review the numbers. Look at the conversion rate and the opt-out rate together. A high conversion rate with a low opt-out rate means the promotion hit the right balance. If the opt-out rate is high even with a good conversion rate, the frequency or the segment needs adjustment.

SMS marketing campaigns are most effective when they feel like a helpful nudge, not a demand. The goal is to keep subscribers engaged enough that they look forward to your messages, not dread them. With a solid schedule, relevant offers, and respectful frequency, you can run promotions that drive results without burning your list.