

The Art of Managing Texting in Your Business

Just as you established a policy to control the use of personal devices brought into the workplace, it may be time to establish a policy covering the practice of texting during working hours. Although texting can be a valuable tool for personal communication, it has a tendency to interfere with employee productivity and, if not managed properly, could affect the reputation of your business.

Texting, however, is hard to control. A TIME Mobility poll revealed "Americans ages 18-29 send and receive an average of nearly 88 text messages per day, compared to 17 phone calls. The numbers change as we get older, with the overall frequency of all communication declining, but even in the 65 and over group, daily texting still edges calling 4.7 to 3.8."

It's natural that your employees would use their cell phones to check with their children, arrange after-work social events, chat with friends and much more. However, these texts vary greatly in importance. Responding to a family emergency is a necessity. Arranging a ride home after work is important. Chit-chatting with friends about weekend social plans is not.

Unnecessary personal texts affect productivity. On the other hand, texting can boost productivity in your business. A policy is needed to make sure texts are a positive addition to your operation and not a negative one.

Some companies ban personal texting altogether, but this is more or less a lost cause in today's mobile-addicted world. Putting no restrictions on texting can work depending upon how much you trust your employees to put their job responsibilities first. Most businesses compromise with a policy that allows some but not all texting and defines those specific limitations.

Establishing your workplace texting policy.

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Your policy should be built around your type of business. A factory, retail store or office environment have very different issues and challenges. However, here are some basic concerns all businesses should consider when setting up a texting policy:

- **Application and Enforcement:** The rules that are established to permit texting in an organization should apply to everyone -- regardless of the person's responsibility or title -- and should be able to be enforced.
- **Safety:** Texting should be banned whenever it affects employee safety. This applies to employees driving delivery or repair vehicles, operating heavy equipment or any worker doing delicate work that requires constant attention.
- **Customer Service:** Just as you ban personal mobile phone calls in front of customers, texting should never be conducted where customers might see it.
- **Texting Customers:** Never send text messages to customers without their prior permission and make it fast and easy for them to rescind that permission.
- **Time:** You can set a policy that allows texting prior to the end of the workday, over lunch, etc.

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Once the policy is established, every employee should receive training on what is and is not allowed. If you feel it's necessary, you might even want to set some kind of penalty for incidents of employees not following the policy. Many companies follow the process of giving employees a verbal warning the first time they are caught texting inappropriately, followed by a written warning, final warning, and then termination.

It's important that everyone in your company understand that texting in front of others is generally rude behavior, which is why it should be banned in the presence of customers. Rude employees position your business as one that does not care about its customers. This can be very damaging to your business reputation.

Using texting to improve communication and productivity.

Research published by Business Wire magazine revealed that text messages average a whopping 95% open rate -- compared to 20% or less when the same information is sent via email message. This implies that, for truly important business-to-business communications, texting might be a smart choice.

Here are just a few examples of how using texting can bring value to your business operation:

- Reaching an executive or employee on a critical issue when that person is in a meeting and cannot answer the phone because the ring would create a disturbance
- Reaching employees after hours about an issue that would affect the next day, such as a schedule change or early-morning meeting
- Alerting employees to a workplace or parking lot danger or other safety issue
- Off-site employees needing to communicate about a job-related issue with other employees who are in an environment where talking aloud via phone is not feasible

As our communication options increase -- phone to email to instant messaging to texting -- so do our opportunities to pay less attention to our work. Establishing a fair but firm texting policy that applies to everyone in the business, from the top down, is the best way to keep these distractions from affecting the bottom line of your business.



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