

CASE STUDY

# How Florida Southern College Builds Relationships with Texting

*Reaching enrollment goals with a smart strategy and the right platform.*

# Overview

A proven method of problem-solving involves removing the barriers that stand in the way of your goals. Florida Southern College had difficulty reaching students and potential students, so they sought a communications method that would help the school meet constituents where they were – texting.

Joe Madigan is the Director of Recruitment Outreach at Florida Southern College and has been with the school for more than six years. Joe supervises admission team members, creating weekly goals for his team.

One of the things that makes FSC unique is their geographic diversity, with only 40% of their students from inside the state of Florida. This case study will show the obstacles FSC faces, the path they've taken, and some impressive results.

# Who is Florida Southern College?



- › Private institution located in Lakeland, Florida
- › 3,000+ students
- › 9,000+ applicants (Undergraduate)
- › 40% male, 60% female
- › First year student profile: 1205 avg. SAT score, 26 average ACT score and 3.76 average GPA

# What are the challenges?

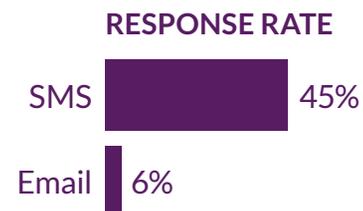
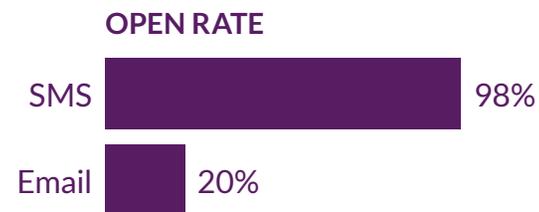
The challenges will likely mirror those of your school, or at the very least look familiar. FSC needed to increase communication with students and parents in a highly competitive marketplace. They needed an easy way to remove communication barriers so they could implement strategies.

- › Smaller school
- › Highly competitive marketplace (more than 30 schools in immediate area)
- › Declining enrollment numbers
- › Limited by available window to call prospective students
- › Must contend with state-based lottery aid and the misconception that it cannot be applied at a private school (it can be)

# Why texting?

“Texting was so effective in helping us reach our enrollment goals that we were able to increase our goals in following cycles.” - Joe Madigan

Quite simply, emails and phone calls weren't working. FSC refers to their traditional methods of communication (phone calls, emails, mailings etc.) as Legacy channels. Using these channels in conjunction with texting has had a tremendous impact on their success. Here is just one example of how effective texting has proven to be over emails:



# Texting in enrollment

Students who texted with Florida Southern are admitted at over a 10% higher rate than students who do not.

Also, the number of texts between school and potential student is a strong indicator. The percentage of accept to deposit yield is extremely high when texting 20-100 times back and forth with a student.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Average Text Per Opt-In	6.9	7.3	7.3	8.98
Enrollment Yield	27.4%	39.3%	22%	19%
Total Enrolled Students	649	691	837 UG Total, 702 UG FR	811 UG Total, 687 UG FR

# Results of texting on application completion and enrollment yield

This chart is proof of the power of meaningful conversations. The more texts sent and received between the FSC staff and a student, the more likely it was that the student deposited.

Text Message Exchanges	Applicants	Accepts	App to Accept Complete Rate	Deposit	Accept to Deposit Yield
<10	2757	1012	37%	105	10%
10-19	1499	1301	87%	200	15%
20-50	1030	990	96%	299	30%
50-100	160	157	98%	90	57%
100+	18	18	100%	12	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5464</b>	<b>3478</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>20%</b>

# Making an investment in your students

“Florida Southern’s admission counselors are relationship builders!” - Joe Madigan

Texting isn’t magic. You need preparation and a strategy to reach your goals. Florida Southern considers itself in the relationship-building business. Because students are building an investment in their school, they feel it’s important to help their students succeed in their individual goals as well.

# The Sweet Spot

In the years refining their texting policies and practices, Florida Southern has set a “budget” for SMS outreach. **The number of texting campaigns they target to send out in a given year is around 18.** The staff believes that this is an apt number of campaigns to keep their students and prospective students engaged without over-texting them. These pillar texts are carefully crafted and scheduled, giving students and prospects important information without exhausting the medium.

$$1 \times 18 = 18$$

Maximum number of texts students should receive from you per week

Approximate threshold above where risk of annoying students becomes significant

Length of yield season in weeks

Total number of texts you're “allowed” to send each student

Allocate this total SMS budget across the communication types listed on the previous slide

# Meet them where they are

Students have questions and need answers, and they prefer to receive that critical information via text.

## STUDENTS FIND SMS PROMPTS AND REMINDERS HELPFUL\*

**86%** of surveyed students said texts prompted them to complete unfinished tasks

**85%** of surveyed students said texts informed them about something they didn't know they needed to do

**84%** of surveyed students said text reminders were useful in helping them get everything done before enrolling

# Stealth-fighter parents of Gen Z students at work

“You can look at the IP addresses. We can actually see 10-15% of the applications were completed by the parent.

This is going to increase. The parent is driving the college search process. You need to be recruiting the whole family, because they’re part of this as well.” - Joe Madigan

**The recipient of the text you’re sending could very well be the student’s parent, not the student.**

According to data from Florida Southern, 28% of the numbers listed for texting on applications received are a parent or guardian’s number. They’re not just “helicopter” parents anymore, they are stealth-fighters. Using data from their CRM Slate, the school assumes that the number is actually more like 40-45% when you account for parents acting as students. **78% of all contact information on FSC visit registration is parent info.**

# Make it count

“A rule of thumb for text message content:  
Is it something students will be grateful to  
you for sending? - Joe Madigan

**Texting works best when you're sending reminders and notifications, not pleasantries.**

Be sure to close your texts with an action prompt like, “Check your email” or “submit your documentation.”

Using your legacy channels in conjunction with texting will produce higher response rates.

## **REMINDERS/NOTIFICATIONS**

- › Deposit deadlines
- › Financial aid deadlines
- › Scholarship deadlines
- › Orientation registration open

## **ACTION PROMPTS**

- › Submit documentation
- › Check email

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