

Textizen

Advertisements encouraging people to provide feedback can be displayed in a variety of ways and venues, such as at transit stops, on telephone poles located on busy public streets, or as tabletop ads in waiting rooms, restaurants, etc.



What it is

Textizen is a web platform that sends, receives, and analyzes text messages. An agency customizes a campaign online by devising question types, creating built-in logic, customizing area codes, etc. People are then invited to participate in the campaign by texting responses to questions that are displayed on transit ads, postcards, at live events, or whatever venue fits the desired audience. Texts sent by participants initiate automated text conversations that address follow-up and/or related questions. The breadth and depth of the text conversations is entirely up to the designer. Textizen also provides outreach strategy, design, and content development services.

Why it Works

Over 90% of Americans have text messaging options on their phones, so opening up participatory communication through that medium carries with it the potential of getting feedback from an enormous population. Perhaps most importantly, it is extremely easy and convenient for people to participate. Depending on where you display the advertisements, people may be in a position where they are waiting or bored (and potentially in the process of using their phones anyway). Participating may actually be a fun way to pass the time. Further, it is a 'no pressure' form of participation: People do not have to go out of their way to send in responses, there is no set length of time that participants must dedicate to responding, it removes any discomfort people might have with dealing with someone in person, it does not require submittal of personal information (other than a cell phone number), it is an extremely simple and easy process, and it is totally free of cost.

When to Use It

Textizen can be used creatively to acquire feedback for any topic. However, while the depth of the questioning can be customized by the agency, it is probably best to keep questions simple and straightforward. It is a great tool for getting lots of quick feedback about basic concepts. The most effective way to keep participants interested is to use 'yes or no' or multiple choice questions with clear and simple options. Overall, an agency should use Textizen to quickly determine if a community has a consensus response to a broad query.

Audience

Anyone who has a cell phone with texting capability can participate. In the past, this may have included a more limited audience, but today this includes people of all ages, socio-economic statuses, etc. Given that the purpose is to receive as much feedback as possible, it would be wise to place advertisements in more densely populated areas. In general, an agency should expect to receive the most feedback from young adults, as they are more adept at using various cell phone features and tools and also are less suspicious about having their cell phones numbers made available.

Examples

[Philadelphia 2035 Comprehensive Plan](#)

[Imagine Boston 2030 Citywide Plan](#)

[Broad-based Public engagement in Kent County, Michigan](#)

Resources

[Textizen](#)

[Blog post about Textizen from the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation](#)

Estimated Level of Effort

The challenging parts of using Textizen are determining what questions to ask and deciding where to place advertisements, and the Textizen team offers assistance for both. Once an agency's questions have been honed and advertisement locations figured out, setting up the campaign online is a fast and painless process. Assuming that the questions are properly devised and the ads effectively located, participants' responses are collected and analyzed by Textizen, which in turn provides the agency with clear and concise data to evaluate.

Cost Considerations

There are myriad factors that can alter the cost of using Textizen, but anticipated survey volume is the primary factor of determination. Setting up a campaign in a large city will be vastly more expensive than setting one up in a suburban town. The outreach strategy, design, and content development services that Textizen offers are considered additional expenses. Lastly, an agency should take into account the expense associated with whatever form of advertising they are utilizing (i.e. – renting ad space at bus stop shelters or on trains, designing, printing, and distributing flyers, etc.).