

EDUCATOR TIPS



Tips for Using Text Messaging and Social Media

Text messaging and social media may be useful tools to reach and educate your audience. The use of social media has evolved over the years and is an evidence-based strategy to disseminate information and promote short-term behavioral changes¹. According to the Pew Research Center, ninety-two percent of Blacks and African Americans own a cell phone², among which 85 percent actively send and receive text messages³. Also, 80 percent of Blacks and African Americans use the internet; and 73 percent of users ages 18 and older visit social networking sites².

Text messaging and social media can be cost-effective tools to reach a wide audience with timely information. Some churches and public health organizations even use text messaging to provide their congregations and clients with health information, including cancer screenings and health-related behaviors⁴. These methods allow you and your organization to personalize and tailor health messages to reach your audience. Popular social media sites used by Blacks and African Americans are listed in the table below⁵.



For more information about working within faith-based organizations, see [*Outreach and Education to Faith-Based Organizations.*](#)

Social Media Site	Percent of Online Black and African American Internet Users to Access Site
Facebook	67
Instagram	38
LinkedIn	28
Twitter	27

Using Text Messaging

Text messaging requires your audience to have access to cell phones that receive texts. Listed below are tips for using text messaging to reach your audience.

- Get permission from the cell phone user to send them text messages. You can include this option on an event *sign-in sheet* or intake form, on your organization's website, in your email signature and many other places.
- Keep text messages short and concise. The message should not be more than 160 characters long.
- Provide information that is interesting and engaging. Start with a statistic, quick fact or question that will make the receiver want to read the whole message.
- Provide ways to access other information, such as a clickable website URL or a phone number.
- Include an option so that the receiver can opt-out from receiving the text messages. Remember, some may have to pay for each incoming message.

Using Social Media

When using social media sites, there are many details to consider. Listed below are some tips for using social media.

- Be sure to consider time, commitment, expertise and resources needed to maintain social media platforms.
- Start with options that are free, require less time and expertise to set up, and can be updated and monitored from anywhere, such as Facebook or Twitter. Once your audience and expertise grow, you can create more time-consuming media, such as videos posted on YouTube, blogs and podcasts.
- Use images that are culturally-appropriate and representative of your audience.
- Create easy-to-read messages so you can reach audiences with lower literacy levels. Keep medical jargon to a minimum unless that jargon is well-defined.
- Make sure the information you are sharing is accurate and evidence-based. Check any statistics before posting. Consider including a reference so that your message will have more impact.
- Use social media sites that allow information to be easily shared with other readers. For example, Twitter allows users to “retweet” messages so their followers can see your message.
- Create informational products (posts, blog entries, tweets, photos, infographics, videos, etc.) that align with current initiatives, such as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, National Mammography Day and Black History Month.



Depending on the type of social media or text messaging services you use, you can measure how many people accessed the information. For instance, some social media sites allow you to see how many people shared your message with others. You can use that information to evaluate your message's reach.

The “Know Your Girls™” campaign was launched by the Ad Council and Susan G. Komen® to educate and inspire black women (primarily 30-45) to understand their breast cancer risk and engage with information and tools that can ultimately promote early detection. This campaign empowers each woman to treat her breasts with the same love and attentiveness she does her closest girlfriends. Here are some sample social posts which can be used if this is your target audience.

Facebook examples:

When it comes to your girls, you're always ready to support them. And we're not talking about your best friends. We're talking about your other "girls" – your breasts. It's important for all of us to understand our individual risk for breast cancer and protect our "girls." Visit KnowYourGirls.org to learn how you can take action to support your breast health. #KnowYourGirls

We know it isn't always easy to talk about breast health, but when it comes to your "girls," it's worth a conversation – and more! KnowYourGirls.org is a great resource for black women to get breast health facts and hear from other women who are starting the conversation. You can also stop by at our [EVENT] in [LOCATION] on [DATE]! #KnowYourGirls

Instagram examples:

We know you take your health as seriously as you take protecting your girls. But did you know that there's a lot you can do to protect your other "girls," too? That's right, we're talking about breast health. We're hosing [EVENT] in [LOCATION] on [DATE] to spread the word and start the conversation about how important it is to #KnowYourGirls. See you, your girls and your "girls" there!

How well do you know your "girls?" We're not talking about your BFFs, but your breasts. Our other "girls" are just as important, and we have to protect them. Stop by [EVENT] in [LOCATION] on [DATE] to get to #KnowYourGirls.

Twitter examples:

Dedicate today to your girls. Your best friends AND your other "girls" – your breasts. Visit KnowYourGirls.org to learn about your #breastcancer risk and encourage your girls to do the same. #KnowYourGirls

We know you'd do anything to protect your girls, so we want to make sure you know how to protect your other "girls" – your breasts. That's why we're hosting a [EVENT] in [LOCATION] on [DATE]. Learn more about breast health at KnowYourGirls.org and see you on [DATE]! #KnowYourGirls

Things to Consider Before Using Texting or Social Media

- Younger audiences use text messaging and social media to a greater degree than older audiences.
- Learn whether your intended audience will receive or access your messaging before embarking on a social media campaign.
- Check your spelling before posting or sending messages.
- Be sure that your audience has cell reception before sending text messages. This is especially important in rural areas where reception may be poor.
- Maintain the privacy of your individual audience members. Never share personal stories, especially those containing protected health information, without getting permission from the person. This applies even if you have changed his or her name.



For more information about working with people living in rural areas, see [Outreach and Education to Rural Black and African American Populations.](#)

- 1 Korda H. and Itani Z. "Harnessing Social Media for Health Promotion and Behavior Change," Health Promotion Practice 14, no. 1 (2013):15-23.
- 2 Smith, A. "African Americans and Technology Use," Pew Research Center, last modified Jan 6, 2014, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/06/African-Americans-and-technology-use/>
- 3 "Internet and American Life Project," PewResearch Center, last modified April 1, 2012, <http://www.pewinternet.org/datasets/april-2012-cell-phones/>
- 4 Schoenberger, Y.M., Phillips, J.M., and Mohiuddin, M.O. "Text Messaging as a Method for Health Ministry Leaders to Disseminate Cancer Information," Journal of Cancer Education, Epub (2014).
- 5 Duggan,M; Ellison,N; Lampe,C; Lenhart,A; & Madden,M. "Demographics of Key Social Networking Platforms," PewResearch Center, last modified January 9, 2015, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014/>
- 6 "CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/GuidetoWritingforSocialMedia.pdf>.