

# The Ultimate Guide to WhatsApp Marketing

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Text **marketing**, once yesterday's news with SMS, is being rejuvenated by mobile messenger apps such as **WhatsApp**, **Facebook** Messenger, WeChat, Viber, and others. With the ubiquity of chat apps, it's no surprise marketers are exploring ways to connect with their audiences.

But the question is, how should you jump on the [WhatsApp marketing](#) brandwagon (pun intended)?

## WhatsApp Marketing Strategy 101

I could tell you about the growth statistics, with **WhatsApp** recently joining the one billion active users club, about the exceptionally high opening rates within minutes of messages being sent and other such facts. Or I could just ask, do you have **WhatsApp**?

If not, install it now, as you shouldn't try to market on a **social** channel you don't personally use. If so, read on to learn more about the power of B2C **WhatsApp marketing**.

## WhatsApp Chat Basics

You have three options with **WhatsApp** how to send image, short video, audio or text messages:

1. **Personal 1-1**: Highly time-consuming for **brands** and thus not overly scalable. However, if you have the resources, it can be effective for personal selling or customer service.
2. **Group Chat**: All messages are shared to all group members including the full list of participants. As each can see the other's replies, it is not highly used for **marketing** purposes, although some companies have had success as a **digital** focus group tool.
3. **Broadcast Lists**: You send the same message to everyone, but each list member does not see if someone else got the same message or any replies. This is the most common scalable **marketing** use case.

As with many **marketing** channels, there are black hats who will, for a fee, send bulk messages on your behalf to their database. Be warned. This is the instant messenger app equivalent of bought email lists. Expect similarly poor performance. Especially as **WhatsApp** has a report

spam button.

## Top 5 Pros

**WhatsApp marketing** has many benefits over both email and other **social** media channels.

1. **Cost-free and algorithm free:** Send messages to your entire subscriber base with no costs. With **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram** all implementing algorithms which severely limit your organic reach, full access without having to 'pay to play' is refreshing.
2. **Message alerts for high engagement:** **WhatsApp** tells your customers when you have sent them a message via push notification. Latest research from **DigitalDefynd** found that your message has on average a 70% chance to be opened, often within minutes, far outstripping email **marketing**
3. **Scalable yet private conversations:** You can have direct contact with your customer shielded from public view. Avoiding those awkward **social** media spats and fails.
4. **Uncluttered environment:** Right now, **WhatsApp** offers a quieter alternative in comparison to **Facebook**, **Twitter** or **Instagram**. Allowing you to get visibility where there is not so much competition.
5. **Extremely loyal subscribers:** Opt-outs are very low, and many **brands** report traffic and conversion metrics from **WhatsApp** are among the best you will see from any **social** channel with a well-executed strategy.

## Top 5 Cons

The grass isn't totally green on instant messaging platforms. There is a basic reality that **WhatsApp** was **designed** for personal communication, not large-scale broadcasting or commercial pushes. The lack of business level accounts makes **WhatsApp** a tougher opportunity to crack.

1. **High user involvement opt-in:** The most common method is encouraging the consumer to add your mobile number to their address book and then send an opt-in message. Alternatively, you can ask the consumer to fill in a form giving you their mobile number, then you send the first message requesting they add you to their contacts. Either way, this is a more lengthy process than simply clicking a 'like' or 'follow' button. But on the plus side, you end up with a much higher quality list.
2. **Broadcast list limits:** **WhatsApp** only permits 256 people per group. Although there is no limit to the number of broadcast lists you can create. Which means if you do achieve scale, there is a fair bit of manual labor to send messages. The more channels you have, the more time it takes to send as the message creation process is duplicated for each channel. But you can see this limitation as motivation for effective segmentation.
3. **WhatsApp belongs to one mobile number:** Not only do you want a dedicated number (you don't want a scaled **marketing** strategy being tied to an individual employee's personal number), but you will need a dedicated phone, as the number and mobile device are inextricably linked.
4. **Mostly manual impact measurement:** While most **social** networks now provide analytics or insights, **WhatsApp** has only total network usage with messages sent and received. But smart marketers can combat some of the dark **social** factor by UTM tagging their post links as well as sharing buttons. And if you're very motivated, there is always the option of manual reporting in Excel for growth and engagement tracking.
5. **Message load:** On less powerful mobile handsets, **WhatsApp** has a tendency to crash when sending to more than one broadcast list at a time, especially if it is a data-heavy message such as video. If this occurs, some of your broadcast messages won't be delivered. But this is easy enough to avoid by waiting for all messages to be delivered before sending to the next batch.

## WhatsApp Marketing Campaign Case Studies

Learning only from your own experience can be professionally costly. So to explore the potential of **WhatsApp marketing**, let's take a look at ten **WhatsApp** winners and losers for [best practices](#) and risky challenges.

## Publishers: Breaking News Alerts



### Huffington Post: Lead the Pack

Turning mobile messaging into a news alert service, Huffington Post was one of the first to take up **WhatsApp marketing**, providing the latest developments in UK politics twice daily.

By utilizing their website and **Facebook** page reach to build an initial audience, limiting down to a specific topic (politics) and launching as the country prepared for the Scottish independence referendum and 2015 elections, Huffington Post gave themselves a solid base. The welcome message on signup is also a nice touch.

However, promoting it as an experiment may have hurt consumer motivation and signup rates. Ask yourself, would you make the effort for something that will likely go away?

**OUTCOME:** The test was ultimately shut down. Chris York, **social** media editor at Huffington Post U.K., commented the process of adding and removing **WhatsApp** users from broadcast lists was so laborious that they stopped actively **marketing** the feature. Despite this, he praised the click-through rate for **WhatsApp** alerts as “insanely high” compared to **Twitter** and **Facebook**. Depending on the story, up to 60%. “If we had as many people signed up on **WhatsApp** as on **Twitter**, that would translate to some massive numbers,” York said.

### The Mirror: Copycat’s Don’t Make the Same Mistakes

Next in line was Huffington Post’s close competitor, The Mirror, who followed suit somewhat shamelessly around six months later with the same political theme tying into the elections. What did they do differently? They understood it required resources and had a clear **WhatsApp marketing** strategy of two selective stories per day.

**OUTCOME:** The account is alive and well one year on with Mike Wright from the Mirror highlighting “steady growth in sign-ups since launch”. The **brand** is enjoying increased user interaction “often to say they agree with a story or are shocked by what they’ve read. On the

whole, we try to interact with people who contact us on **WhatsApp**. Even just to say thanks for the feedback. We have had a few exchanges about what they'd like to see from the service, which we find very helpful. We find responding to people generates a positive response and they like that we take the time to respond."

### **The Guardian: Live Event Coverage for a Very Small Group**

The Guardian was next into the foray. Also using a political theme, but with an interesting twist. Live coverage of the final Republican debate. "It'll be just like chatting with a friend, except we aren't friends. Yet." the launch article cheekily mentions. The solo 256 contact broadcast channel they were willing to create filled up before the debate began and The Guardian had to update their article turning people away from **WhatsApp** to their live blog.

**OUTCOME:** Rapid reader take up, but not enough **social** media capacity to involve readers led to very poor user experience. The publisher has not tried again since.

### **British Vogue: Live Event Coverage and More for the Masses**

But it seems this idea may have inspired British Vogue, coinciding with New York Fashion Week coverage, the publisher kicked off sending the latest runway looks and fashion news to followers' phones first. Images from the Chanel, Saint Laurent, and Alexander McQueen runway shows, pushed out under an hour after the collections were shown creating initial engagement. And since then a steady stream of up to two posts per day, selecting high quality, exclusive news, have been enjoyed by subscribers.

**OUTCOME:** Vogue commented that both early sign-up numbers and user engagement have been "impressive" but wouldn't give specifics. Here is our first success story, having a solid strategy and enough resources to execute.

### **BBC: WhatsApp First Approach**

The evolution continued. BBC achieved over 25,000 subscribers to their Ebola Crisis **WhatsApp** channel to receive up to three health alerts daily. They followed this up with a broadcast channel covering the Richard III remains discovery. Leveraging on that experience, they have now launched "Young, Angry and Connected", a series of stories about young Africans who feel marginalized leveraging messenger apps get their voices heard. The daily three-minute long video clips are section of a larger documentary, which only become available online at the end of that week. The '**WhatsApp** first' publishing strategy is commendable for its cutting edge nature.

**OUTCOME:** With 2,000 subscribers anticipated for the new series and past campaigns highly effective due to novel approaches and tailored content, the BBC has a solid approach to **WhatsApp marketing**. But IMHO, they are building lists of interested, engaged audiences and after the series is done, discarding them to **WhatsApp** oblivion as the mobile number becomes inactive when the series ends. Making the user do the work to sign up for the next series may reduce the effectiveness over time.

## E-Commerce: Brand Building & Direct Selling



### Absolut Vodka: The Power of Exclusivity

Absolut Vodka also adopted an engaging persona for their **brand**, a doorman named Sven. To celebrate the launch of their Absolut Unique collection, the **brand** hosted an exclusive party. So exclusive, only two invites were available to the general public. The goal of the **WhatsApp** campaign? Convince Sven why you should get to go.

<https://youtu.be/ozFLRwzyO6Q>

**OUTCOME:** An effective **brand** awareness campaign generating over 600 messages on **WhatsApp**, well covered in the media and spillover engaging audiences on other **social** sites such as **Facebook** and YouTube. Representing your **brand** with a character suits the nature of **WhatsApp**'s personal messaging platform. If you need to interact, not only push, personality is important. What's more, a fictional persona can be used again to promote different events (unlike Clark's non-fiction based characters) although Absolut does not seem to be taking advantage of this opportunity.

### Clarks: The Power of Storytelling

Shoe **brand** Clark's took an interactive storytelling approach with its series "From Rats to Rudeboys", showcasing the role its Desert Boot has played in three separate movements. Each subculture was represented by a character based on a real person whom users could add on **WhatsApp** to be sent a series of messages which brought to life the cultural relevance of the **brand**. Clark's was aiming to align the **brand** with youth culture and boost the coolness factor.

<https://youtu.be/IClbpkZCtDo>

**OUTCOME:** While an interesting foray into sales via messaging apps but limited by the need for

scale, as the user would sign up, and then have to wait before the “live chat” began on a scheduled date. No data was published on the campaign’s success.

### **Hellmann’s: The Power of Getting Personal**

Hellmann’s Mayonnaise decided to take a more 1-1 approach. Their WhatsCook campaign was a real-time service connecting people to professional cooks. The user would share the contents of their fridge, and the chef responded with meal ideas using the **brand’s** mayonnaise and taught the user how to cook it.

<https://youtu.be/xYN9A09iy5Y>

**OUTCOME:** On average, WhatsCook’s 13,000 users spent 65 minutes interacting with the chef while they cooked. A highly successful campaign because Hellmann’s found a way to be truly helpful to consumers. The one drawback, the campaign needs a heavy 1-1 workload, so was not sustainable long-term.

### **GetMyPeon & Rare Pink: More Power to SME’s**

Errand-running service GetMyPeon encourages their customer base to book via **WhatsApp** message. Jeweller Rare Pink employee’s act as personal shoppers, engaging with consumers on **WhatsApp** to exchange pictures of products they are interested in, answer questions and even agreeing on payment and delivery. There is nothing holding back restaurants, hotels, salons, delivery services or other SME’s following suit. But such personal 1-1 messaging is not always a viable option for larger scale companies.

**OUTCOME:** Both **brands** are reporting selling a significant portion of online sales via **WhatsApp**. This strategy particularly useful for SME’s who cannot yet afford to build a dedicated mobile app but want a stronger mobile presence.

### **Tisu: The Power of KISS (Keep it Simple Stupid)**

One of my company’s **brands**, the daily deal site Tisu, has a very straight forward approach. No launch event, no promotional campaign, no personal shopping. Simply send select offers from the site each day, providing a more convenient way to shop. Essentially, the **WhatsApp** equivalent of a daily newsletter.

**OUTCOME:** With a moderate number of subscribers, **WhatsApp** now contributes almost as many sessions as **Facebook**. The strategy is sustainable long-term. Traffic steadily grows as the broadcast lists grow. There may be opportunities for Tisu to utilize tactics once useful for SMS **marketing**, such as contests and giveaways, to increase the subscriber base as such promotions would be in line with the cost-saving traits of their persona.

### **Takeaways From WhatsApp Campaign Examples**

No matter the industry, all **WhatsApp** case studies showed interest from the consumers to

engage with **brands** on the mobile messenger platform. This can lead to an impact on not only **brand** exposure, but also sessions and even revenue. This interest can be boosted via well-executed campaigns and tying into public events.

Many failures came from the **brand** themselves not being prepared to leverage the opportunity. Or by limiting **WhatsApp** as a supportive element of larger campaigns, rather than capitalizing on the channels long-term potential.

But with planning and dedication, some **brands** are emerging as successful **WhatsApp** marketers and gaining loyalists early in the channel's development. For longer term campaigns, user value is most commonly derived by number-limited strategy (sending only the most important content) or time-limited strategy (update as important events take place).

## Creating Your First WhatsApp Campaign

### Decide on Your WhatsApp Marketing Strategy

Before anything else, you must be able to answer the following questions:

**What is the benefit to consumers to engage with you on WhatsApp:** With the high commitment sign-up process, you need to ensure there is enough value not only to entice the subscription but keep them engaged on what is still felt to be a personal network.

**What content will you distribute:** Will you offer advice, breaking news, transactional confirmations. In what format; text, images, audio, video or a combination taking into consideration impact on data usage of your audience. Can you prepare all content in advance, or must it be created day by day?



**When will the campaign end:** Will it be a limited time campaign or continual strategy? This will impact not only your chosen communication method but also the resources required. Personal 1-1 messages may be sustainable for an SME, but for larger companies you may hit scalability issues. Broadcast lists, on the other hand, are more scalable, but of course can lose that personal touch.

**How will you segment your audience:** Similar to email **marketing**, effective segmentation into groups of 256 can make mass communications seem tailored to an individual. But this costs you more time.

**When will you send messages:** Based on the above question of what is important for consumers and what your **brand** wishes to commit, you can then begin to discuss frequency. If you want a limited campaign, you may be able to do 1-1 personalized messages as needed for five days by getting the **marketing** team to for that short period to help out in shifts. A continual strategy, using highly specific broadcast lists may require a dedicated resource if you wish to send two messages a day. But if you choose a frequency of once a week, this can be combined with other channels.

**Who is responsible:** For creating the content. For managing broadcast lists. For sending the messages. For replying to consumers. For any tasks that need to be done. Having clear responsibilities will be key to a smooth campaign. No matter what, you need to prepare for some HR drain and have a plan how you will respond if the strategy gets low, medium, or high traction. Your consumers have little care for your resource constraints. If they make the effort to message you, they expect a swift reply (even if you are using broadcast lists). Timely communication is essential for your **brand** reputation on **WhatsApp**. If you can work in shifts to be available 12 hours a day, such as in publishing houses, fantastic. If not, then ensure you manage expectations by communicating when **WhatsApp** is 'on'.

**How will you measure success:** UTM tagging will provide metrics in Google Analytics. But it's likely this will not be sufficient if you are a data junky. How will you go about tracking other KPIs such as the below and over what period (daily, weekly, for the entire campaign, etc)?

- Number of subscribers
- Number of unsubscribes
- Reason for opt-out
- Subscriber interest
- Number of messages/broadcasts sent
- Content type; text, image, video or audio
- Delivery rate
- Open rate
- Click through rate
- Number of interactions
- Tone of interactions

## Get Setup to Send

Once you have chosen the phone number and mobile handset you wish to send from, download **WhatsApp** and create an account. Be sure to configure in line with your strategy:

1. Name (25 character limit and visible to your **WhatsApp** contacts)
2. Profile picture (your 640x640 image will be shown in a circle)
3. Status (139 character limit to show the value of subscribing to your **WhatsApp**)

Have a plan how you will name contacts and broadcast lists. Clear conventions will be highly helpful once you hit scale.

Be sure to connect your mobile device to an email address to automatically sync and backup contacts when they are added.

web.**whatsapp**.com is an online platform that allows you to connect your account to your computer via QR code. I highly recommended using this official tool, as creating messages and managing broadcast list is somewhat fiddly on a mobile.

At this time, I would also be careful of utilizing a managed service. For example, whappend.com charges you money to use a service where you don't own the sender number (how would you feel about not owning your email sender address?), can not embed any links, and where you will not receive replies for five hours with only an 80% recovery rate. **Whatsappmarketing.es** only allows you to upload a profile picture when you spend 0.03 EUR per message. A mind-blowingly steep rate per send when **WhatsApp** itself is free to use. The value for money is highly questionable at this stage. However, it's worthwhile to keep an eye on bulk messaging services if/when **WhatsApp** allows business-level accounts.

Launch Big and Brave

**WhatsApp** offers no recommended users or user search functionality. No **branded** profile page you can link to. No ads. For your audience to be aware you're on **WhatsApp**, you need to tell them. And you should go big. Small lists tend not to be worth the manual effort **WhatsApp** requires.

As highlighted in the **WhatsApp marketing** case studies above, the more common opt-in strategy is to encourage the user to message you first (thus, needing to add you to their contacts).

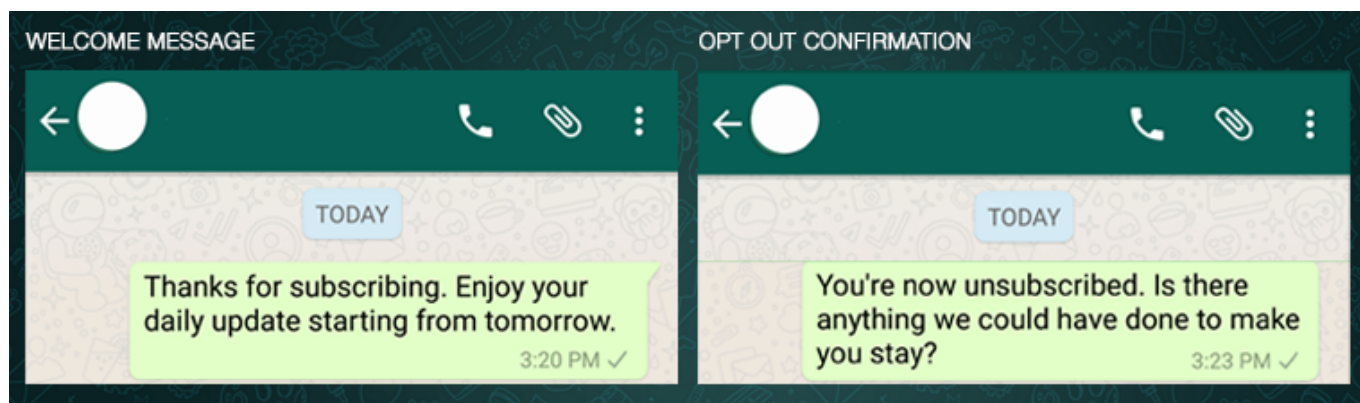
Tying this into an event is a good launch opportunity. This can be external (such as an election, public holiday, etc.) or **brand** driven (product launch, **branding** campaign, etc.). Either way, it provides a context, a reason, for the new channel being launched and can ramp up excitement.

If your **brand** ventured into SMS **marketing** in the past, what promotional tactics worked there? If you offered prizes or sent coupons what was the impact on the subscriber loyalty? Build on your past experiences with similar channels.

Where are you going to communicate your **WhatsApp** number:

- **Facebook** posts? **Twitter**? **Instagram**?
- Email newsletters?
- Transactional emails?
- Your website?
- An article on your blog?
- An article on someone else's blog?
- Online display ads?
- Ads on radio, TV, magazines or billboards?
- Business cards?
- Product packaging?

Like many **digital** communications, a conversational welcome message reply to their an opt-in is a best practice user experience. This also allows you to set clear expectations for when messages will begin to arrive and confirm value. When users opt out, an unsubscribe confirmation message is also a great opportunity for user feedback on how to improve your strategy.



## Post Launch

This is where the fun starts. Keep track of your **WhatsApp** campaign progress. But bear in mind, the data alone is not useful. It only becomes interesting when you spend the time to interpret it. Tweaking and optimizing as you go to improve performance. I find an easy way to achieve this is to ask yourself, “so what does it mean?”.

For example:

- I posted more images with links rather than text with links this week. So what does it mean?
- This caused an increase in CTR by 2%. So what does it mean?
- My audience is more visual. I should invest more time into high-quality image content.

And don't forget to publish your success. All those media sites who talked about your launch

on **WhatsApp**, follow-up with data on the campaign outcomes.

## Looking to the Future of Mobile Messaging Apps

It seems **Facebook** is looking to use Messenger, as it has more personal data than **WhatsApp**, as the instant messaging platform for transactions. I predict an integration of business payment options (personal payments are already available in the US) and product feeds allowing a full conversion funnel in Messenger (including product search, purchase and post-purchase communications) for both goods and services. This will provide a strong competitor to WeChat, where much of this functionality is already available.

While this could be possible for **WhatsApp** as well. I think it is more likely we will see **WhatsApp** for business emerge more as a customer service and/or promotional broadcasting tool.

Founder [Jan Koum](#) wrote in a recent blog post that “Starting this year, we will test tools that allow you to use **WhatsApp** to communicate with businesses and organizations that you want to hear from. That could mean communicating with your bank about whether a recent transaction was fraudulent, or with an airline about a delayed flight.”

Customer service seems to be the approach **WhatsApp** itself wishes to take. But, based on audience enthusiasm for promotional messages, if more **brands** continue to push into the **WhatsApp marketing** space (as I hope this article has encouraged you to do) the market itself will also influence the messenger platforms future direction.

At some point, we can expect not only business level accounts (I pray for them to remove the 256 broadcast limit along with this), tools for publishers to manage and send to their contacts with ease, and also the opening up of an API. This would allow not only automated analytics but the a treasure trove of data on the opted in user's name, messaging history, location, and more to help us send more relevant content to users.

I would also not be surprised if someone is already building a website which lists **brand**'s **WhatsApp** numbers so you can browse and find new content to follow.

It is clear. In the Darwinian world of **social** media, **brands** with the largest **advertising** budgets or the most **social** media followers are not guaranteed success. It's those who understand their audience and leverage this to better serve their customers will ultimately win.

There is no denying **WhatsApp marketing** is in its infancy. But I urge you, instead of focusing on what we have now, look at how people's habits change and change with them. Investing time in **WhatsApp** now and understanding what works for your **brand**, will pay off shortly.

## Image Credits

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