

# How to Write Automated Texts That Sound Human Not Robotic

Every text to a customer represents a chance to build a relationship. Here are 10 ways to do it better.

By Leslie O’Flahavan and Rich Weborg

**I**f your customers have opted in to receive texts from your company, they probably realize that some of your texts are going to be sent by an automated system and that you don’t actually have a human employee, chained to a desk, hand-typing each appointment confirmation or loyalty program welcome message! However, even if your texts to customers are automated, they shouldn’t sound mechanical. Here are 10 tips to help you write automated texts that sound human and build rapport with your customers.

**1. Use familiar, conversational words.** Text is closer to speech than any other written form of customer service, so choose words that you’d use if you were talking to a customer. This text from ZocDoc uses “info” and “Just remind,” which makes this text sound like it’s coming from a friendly company. (It also fits nicely within the 160 character limit).

*Your info has been sent to your healthcare provider. Just remind the office that you completed your forms online thru ZocDoc! Problems? Reply “s” for support*

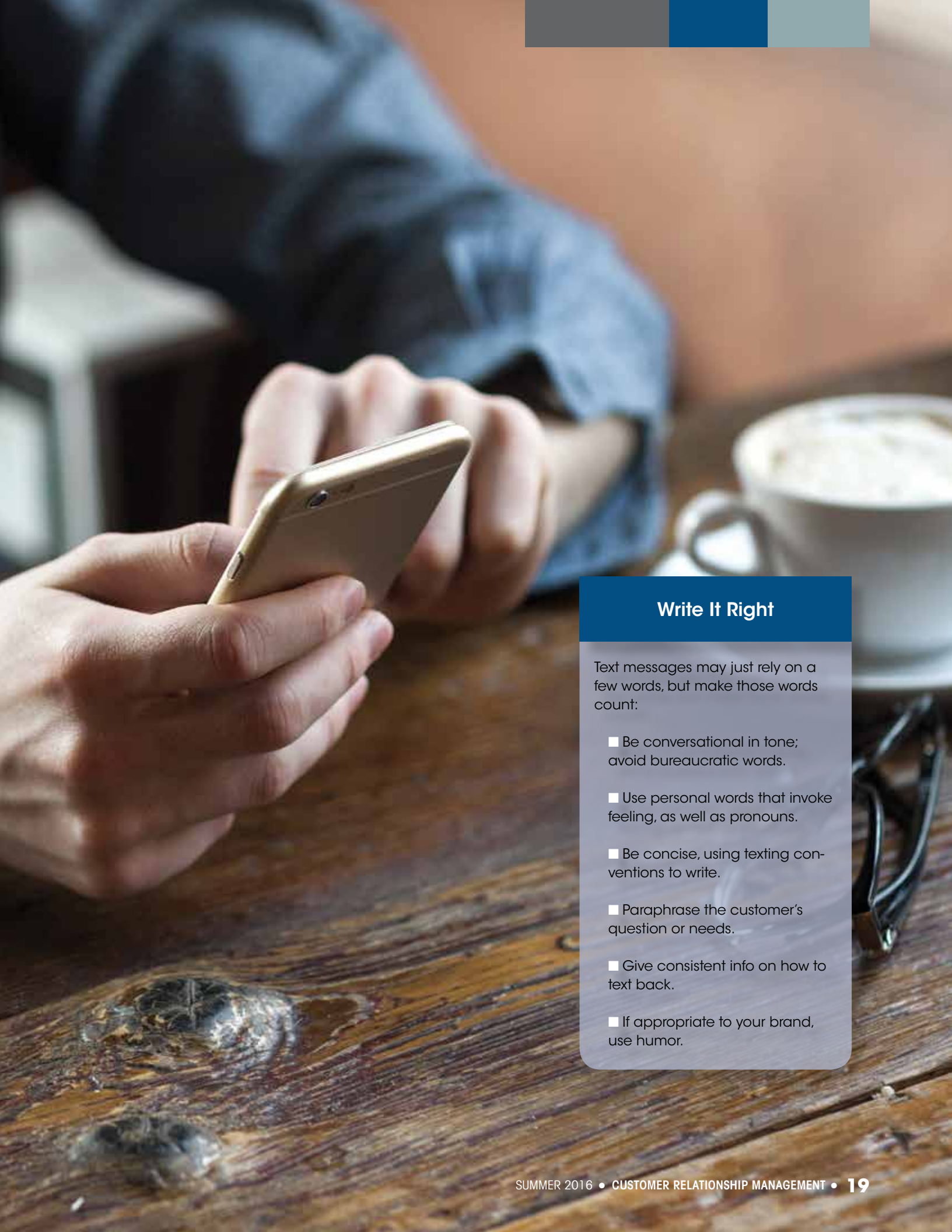
**2. Be concise.** Wordy texts read like form letters, and no customer thinks, “Oh, you wrote this form letter just for me?” Cut the word count and you’ll come across as more personal.

**Original - not concise:** AT&T Free Msg: Welcome abroad! Our AT&T Passport app is required to use in Wi-Fi in participating hotspots. If you have not already done so, please visit [www.att.com/getpassportapp](http://www.att.com/getpassportapp) for iPhone, iPad or Android devices. Data charges may apply for download.

**Revised - concise:** AT&T Free Msg: Welcome abroad! You’ll need our AT&T Passport app to use Wi-Fi in participating hotspots. Please visit [www.att.com/getpassportapp](http://www.att.com/getpassportapp) to download it on your iPhone, iPad or Android device. Data charges may apply.

**3. Give consistent instructions about how to text back.** You’re going to use those automated texts repeatedly, so write them right. Don’t explain the same task two different ways in the same text—you don’t want to confuse your customer.

**Original - confusing instructions about how to text back:** Salon H20:



## Write It Right

Text messages may just rely on a few words, but make those words count:

- Be conversational in tone; avoid bureaucratic words.
- Use personal words that invoke feeling, as well as pronouns.
- Be concise, using texting conventions to write.
- Paraphrase the customer's question or needs.
- Give consistent info on how to text back.
- If appropriate to your brand, use humor.

Reply “C” to confirm Brenda’s appt on Fri, Dec 18 at 12:30 PM. If you have questions, call 301-774-7999. HELP = Help STOP = End msgs

**Revised - consistent instructions:** Salon H20: Reply C to confirm Brenda’s appt on Fri, Dec 18 at 12:30 PM. If you have questions, call 301-774-7999. Reply “help” for help or “stop” to end msgs

#### 4. Use feeling words.

One way to offset the automated quality of automated texts is to use words that indicate feelings. (Everyone knows robots don’t have feelings!) Words like “sorry,” “love” and “happy” all evoke an emotional response in the reader.

**Example:** A&F: Sorry to see you go! You’ve been unsubscribed from texts. You will no longer receive messages. Contact 866-712-1032 or <http://bit.ly/WW3Ww> for more info.

While this automated text from a presidential candidate doesn’t use a word that names a feeling, such as “sorry,” it uses intense, connected words to build a feeling of connection, including, “at the heart” and “you’re with me.”

**Example:** To South Carolina, the volunteers at the heart of our campaign and the supporters who power it: thank you. If you’re with me, chip in now: <http://hrc.ms/bb> -- H

**5. Use personal pronouns.** If you want your automated texts to connect to your customer, use pronouns such as “we,” “you” and “us.” Personal words make your texts sound, well, personal.

**With personal pronouns - builds the relationship:** We noticed it’s your first time participating! FYI: Your phone number is completely private and we’ll never spam you.

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**Without personal pronouns - the text sounds cold:** Thanks for participating for the first time!

## Text is closer to speech than any other written form of customer service, so choose words that you’d use if you were talking to a customer.



FYI: Phone numbers are kept completely private and PollEverywhere.com doesn’t send spam.

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**6. Consider using humor if it’s consistent with your brand.** If your brand voice is light, hip or irreverent, try humor in your automated texts. Don’t try humor if it gets in the way of your message, however. (Local governments texting citizens about severe weather, I’m talking to you.)

**Example:** Breaking News! Your GrubHub order is being prepared. Our crystal ball estimates your delivery time between 1:25 PM and 1:35 PM.

**7. Use the conventions for writing text, not email.** Your automated texts to customers don’t need to resemble the other ways you write. In fact, they shouldn’t. Texts rarely use “From” to

identify the sender, and they don’t need subject lines. The wording in this text makes the sender sound both automated and unaware of how texts are commonly written.

FROM: Headlines Hair Designers

SUBJ: Appt Reminder

MSG: Fri, Feb 12 3:00 pm – Female Hair Cut @ Headlines Hair Designers

The writing in this text has two other problems:

**“Female Hair Cut.”** That’s just not what the customer would call it. She’d call it a haircut. She knows she’s female. If Headlines books a longer time for “female” haircuts than it does for “male” haircuts, that’s not information the customer needs to deal with. And the phrase “female hair cut” is just all kinds of wrong.

**“@ Headlines Hair Designers.”** Avoid using the @ sign when you need to write “at.” It makes your text look like it includes a Twitter handle, which could be confusing.

**8. Avoid bureaucratic words.** Text is a casual customer service channel, even when automated. Don't use words that make you sound like a lawyer.

**Original - bureaucratic wording:** SAFETY MESSAGE: Please ensure your phone is now switched off. Your cabin crew will advise when phones may be switched on again. Thank you for flying Emirates.

**Revised - plain language:** SAFETY MESSAGE: Please check to be sure your phone is now switched off. Your cabin crew will let you know when you may switch your phone on again. Thanks for flying Emirates!

**9. Avoid weird abbreviations and capitalizations.**

Automated texts need to be short, given the fact that space is at a premium. However, don't abbreviate things in a manner no one would recognize. What will most customers think the "S:" means in the flood warning text? Be as clear as possible.

**Weird abbreviation:** S: Alert Montgomery Flood Warning - The National Weather Service has issued a FLOOD WARNING for Montgomery County as of 6pm (2/24/16). Flash flooding of streams, creeks, and low-lying areas is occurring or imminent. Do not drive through flooded areas. Do not drive through flood barriers.

Most texts use sentence case ("You qualify for more minutes"), not title case ("You Qualify for More Minutes,") because most texts are written in short sentences. There's no reason to write "Msg & Data Rates May Apply" in title case. It makes this text seem more robot-written than human-written.

**Weird capitalization:** AMC: Conf #123456789. 7 tickets to see Interstellar on 11/29/2016 at 3:25 PM <http://bit.ly/ABC1dEf> Msg & Data Rates May Apply

In the text below, the customer is probably wondering, "Why are you screaming at me?" and "Isn't an LPN a Licensed Practical Nurse?" I'd write out "license plate" this time, or at least do "Plate #."

**Weird capitalization and abbreviation:** PARK-



**Don't explain the same task two different ways in the same text—you don't want to confuse your customer.**

ING SESSION DEACTIVATION REMINDER. Will deactivate: 9:59 PM. Activated: 3/20/2015 7:29 PM. Zone:12345 Space: n/a LPN: 2AB1234

**10. Paraphrase the customer's question or need in the automated response.**

The best way to show someone you're listening (or reading) closely is to restate what he or she asked for or wanted to know. In live customer service, we paraphrase to confirm that we understood the customer's request. In automated customer service, paraphrasing is only possible when you're sending specific, not generic, responses.

Though automated, this text comes across as genuine because the second sentence paraphrases the customer's question or need.

**Example:** Thanks for contacting Evanston 311. Please reply with the name of a restaurant that you are interested in seeing a health score for.

So, to wrap up, even if you're sending automated texts, you should write them in a personal, friendly, connected style. Every text to a customer represents a chance to build a relationship. **CRM**



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