

# College Possible Increases Enrollment Rates with Messaging



College Possible is a non-profit organization that envisions a day when the future of America's children is determined solely by their talent, motivation, and effort. The organization's coaches converse with students through messaging, to increase enrollment and graduation rates through removing the barriers to earning a college degree.

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-Nankya Senungi

Manager of Salesforce Integration, College Possible

## Overview

The organization seeks to enable more low income students to go to college and graduate. They have an intensive curriculum of teaching and support via student coaches to facilitate this outcome with after-school training for junior and senior high school students. College Possible operates in six US cities and is introducing virtual and blended learning solutions to expand its reach.

## The Challenge

Between the students' senior year of high school and when they enter university, there tends to be a lack of support for students and parents. As a result, students often don't go to the university they'd planned to attend; a phenomenon known as summer melt. College Possible has a limited staff capacity in summer, which reduces the ability of the coaches to communicate personally with all the students in their database to support them in their journey toward college.

## Answering the Challenge

The National College Access Network subsidized a program to use text messaging for summer melt campaigns<sup>1</sup> via Signal Vine. The Signal Vine campaigns allowed College Possible to send text messages regularly to their students during summer, to increase the rate of enrollment.

The non-profit also noticed that their coaches were using text messaging to converse with students on their own. College Possible wanted to centralize messaging so that coaches wouldn't have to use their own number, as well as to create a repository of these conversations for managerial review, and historical record.

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"There are higher engagement rates with SMS versus any other communication method. So it's worth our while to do that rather than email or messenger or Twitter," says Senungi.

After a few years, the non-profit decided to move away from Signal Vine as it was expensive and not integrated with Salesforce. Toggling between two platforms was cumbersome and time consuming for coaches.

College Possible wanted a solution that integrated with Salesforce and enabled them to see all their conversations with all their students in one place. Also, they wanted to track historical records. SMS-Magic met all their requirements.

A client of one of the non-profit's sister organizations, College Forward, uses SMS-Magic to support 100,000 students in Tennessee. Their success helped College Possible decide in favor of SMS-Magic.

## How College Possible Uses Messaging to Engage and Encourage Students

The non-profit texts students during the summer before their first year of college, to overcome summer melt. Also, they continuously message students throughout their college years to encourage their success.

*Please note: In the conversations below, green represents an automated conversation, yellow represents a 1:1 conversation.*

## Using Messaging to Help Students Make the Transition from Application to Enrollment

College Possible's coaches send text messages to high school seniors every week, asking questions like 'Have you registered for classes' or 'Do you have a ride to campus?'

These basic questions help the non-profit know whether students are on track to enter university in September. They also start conversations, as students often send questions asking for help, like 'I don't know how to register for orientation.' "It's a two-way street," says Senungi.

The use of texting and allowing students to initiate conversations increased engagement rates with students. College Possible also sends messages as deadline reminders.

"For the smaller things that can help lead up to bigger things, text messaging is good," says Senungi. For instance, coaches use messages to schedule calls with students.

SENT

Hi Ashley, this is Dave from College Possible. Have you filled out your financial aid forms?

RECEIVED

Hi Dave, I need help with more scholarships. Thanks, Ashley

SENT

Hey Ashley, don't forget the application form for the XYZ scholarship is due tomorrow. Dave

"For the smaller things that can help lead up to bigger things, text messaging is good."

## Using Messaging to Keep Students in College

After a few years of such steady engagement rates with students leading up to attending college, the non-profit decided to continue using messaging with these students once they were in college to help them stay the course through to graduation.

This increased the ongoing load for coaches which made text messaging even more useful for staying in touch with larger cohorts. A college coach could be handling 80 to 160 students, compared to a high school student coach, who would work with 40 students.

To send more targeted messages, College Possible segments students and texts them. For instance, if there's a scholarship for accounting majors, the non-profit will filter for a list of accounting majors in Salesforce and message them about the opportunity.

SENT

Hey Kyle, there's a scholarship for accounting majors, you should consider applying. More here <Insert url>. Gail

Documentation can be a stressor for students. College Possible students and coaches both find MMS helpful in preparing to apply for various things. "Our students love MMS because then they can send us screenshots of documents and vice versa," says Senungi. In the summer of 2018, the non-profit also plans to send videos of college students with encouraging messages to high school students to help them to make the decision to attend college.

## Using Messaging to Combat Summer Melt

The student-to-coach ratio goes up significantly in summer, even to as high as 300:1. The non-profit still needs to respond to student queries and follow up with them. "We rely on SMS a lot to increase capacity when there's a decrease in working staff," says Senungi.

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Since the non-profit doesn't have the capacity during summer to call up students or have one-to-one conversations with them, they rely on bulk messages. "It's easier for someone to manage an inbox of 300 students via text message than physically a group of 300 students, which can be a lot," says Senungi.



College Possible sends out a text every week to students in the summer. During the week, this can be supplemented with more messages by a coach or a staff member, based on specific student needs.

Since the national office of the non-profit mostly sends text messages during summer, rather than coaches, they watch out for keywords in the messages, to decide what should be a staff member's next step.

For instance, if College Possible sends a text message asking, 'Have you registered for classes?' and a student replies 'No,' a staff member would focus on finding out why they haven't registered and what support they need.

## Highlighting the Business Value of Messaging

**Higher engagement with students.** College Possible has an 87% engagement rate via texts, with high school seniors about to enter university, over summer for the past four years. "Students tend to respond better to text messages than email. We know that our students struggle with keeping up with their email. Their cell phones are much more accessible," says Senungi.

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**Increase in capacity.** Messaging helps the non-profit increase their capacity without the actual people on the ground.

**Continuously communicate with students during summer melt.** Text messaging ensures College Possible continues to be a resource for students over summer as they enter college, move from first year to second year and on through graduation.

## SMS-Magic Converse is a “Game Changer”

When we asked about SMS-Magic's new Converse Desktop, Senungi said that it has been a game-changer. “Just having that inbox view kind of similar to an email, something that you've been used to seeing for your entire life and being able to translate that into SMS has been really helpful,” says Senungi.

With the Converse Desktop, the non-profit's managers can view the conversations coaches have with students to understand student concerns, which in turn helps inform their programming. Also, managers know whether the coach is using the right tone and answering the question correctly. They can also identify potential opportunities for more training, in case they see there's a lack of understanding on the coach's part.

## Looking Toward the Future

College Possible's 200 coaches interact with 30,000 students. Currently 60% of the non-profit's coaches are using text messaging. The others will be included in the non-profit's Salesforce org in fall 2018 and begin using messaging too.

Through their curriculum, College Possible is delivering a specific message to students to help them be successful in applying to college and make sure they attend and reach graduation. Texting helps the non-profit and their coaches ensure students stay on track and allows students to reach out for assistance whenever they need help. Texting will help them meet the organization's vision for the future of America's children.

## Source

1. [https://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/g\\_Castleman\\_SummerTextMessages.pdf](https://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/g_Castleman_SummerTextMessages.pdf)

## About SMS-Magic

SMS-Magic is a proven, global messaging platform for Salesforce, with over 1500 clients accessing 59 direct carriers. SMS-Magic enables Salesforce users to engage buyers and win and retain more new customer revenue, while creating strong customer relationships that drive sustainable competitive advantage. SMS-Magic is the most positively reviewed messaging application on Salesforce AppExchange.



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