

2-1-1 Eastern Oklahoma Extends COVID Help with Toll-Free MMS through Textel

A Critical Resource for Oklahomans

In 2020, more than 100,000 people reached out to 211 Eastern Oklahoma, a service provided by the Community Service Council. "I need help with utilities." "My rent hasn't been paid, and I have no electricity or air conditioning." "I am eight months pregnant, and I have no type of income right now." "Where can I get a COVID-19 test?" "I just became homeless, and I'm wondering what my options are." These are just a sample of the urgent requests 211 Eastern Oklahoma fields every day, 24/7.

Michael Coonfield, Director of Strategic Operations, and Ashlie Casey, Program Director for 211 Eastern Oklahoma, support 37 counties. They're on a mission to connect residents in need to more than 1,100 agencies representing 9,864 services. A major piece of that mission is creating awareness.

A Proactive Approach to Services

Rather than wait for people to approach them for help, Michael and Ashlie wanted to immediately educate residents of services when it's most relevant to them. "We had a winter storm here this year which left thousands of people without water," explains Ashlie. "It's those instances where we want to notify them of disaster relief resources immediately."

211 Eastern Oklahoma historically relied on shortcode numbers (e.g., 898211) to text customers. "It's great because it has a low annual cost," says Michael. "But the downside is you have to share numbers and keywords. On top of that, during the height of the pandemic, our shortcode wasn't being sent out. We were sending out 20,000 text messages, and half of them were undeliverable."

Outbound and Inbound Workflows with Textel

Michael wanted to capture the advantages of using a toll-free number over shortcode. "It gave us greater control while also being a number anyone could call to get the help they needed." As luck would have it, they were able to get Textel through their relationship with NICE CXone, a leading contact-center-as-a-service solution.

Once Textel and NICE were implemented, 211 Eastern Oklahoma began building a texting contact list. They promoted it on their website, in video, in their IVR messages, and with every caller. "On every call, we'd ask if we could add them to our email and texting list," says Michael. To ensure regulatory compliance, 211 Eastern Oklahoma checks annually with subscribers to see if they'd like to continue receiving text messages. "In over 37 counties, there's bound to be someone who changes numbers, so we like to check.



At a Glance

Industry

Non-Profit

Location

United States

Employees:

63

Vision:

To connect vulnerable and under-resourced Tulsans with the support, information, and services they need to be strong, safe, and healthy.

"Textel allows us to reach people instantly with information that can positively change their lives."

Textel is great because it can automatically remove unsubscribes from our master list.”

From there, they worked out a calendar for text notifications. Absent an emergency, they send a message every two weeks. It may be something as generic as “Did you know that 211 Eastern Oklahoma can help you with food assistance?” or they target a specific segment (e.g., a specific county). They also time them around events such as tax filings. Depending on the text’s importance, 211 Eastern Oklahoma coordinates their social media marketing (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), newspapers, and news channels to align with the text notification.

211 Eastern Oklahoma uses a textbot integrated with NICE CXone and trained agents to manage inbound texts. The textbot gathers necessary customer demographic information before routing the text to an agent to help with referrals. “The integration is great between NICE CXone and Textel,” says Michael. “Agents can easily manage texts in the same window they use for chats. They see no difference between the two skills.”

A Valuable Resource for Everyone

211 Eastern Oklahoma was surprised to see how low the unsubscribe rate was with texting despite sending out a lot of messages. “Out of the 20,000 subscribers we send text messages to, we maybe get 40-50 people unsubscribe each month. That’s a .2% unsubscribe rate, which is fantastic for us. But we also have a whole lot more people sign up to replace them.”

“We can be strategic with our texts as well,” Michael explains. “If our agents are already slammed, we use texts to drive traffic to the website, or if we see a lull in calls, we’ll funnel text traffic that way.”



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To measure the impact of their texts, 211 Eastern Oklahoma would include unique links for each text message. Anytime they sent out a text message, they would immediately see a spike in web traffic. They’d also see an increase in call volume.

“We gained a lot of brand recognition out of this,” says Michael. “That’s because we could send our logo and social media links with it. That way, they always associated the texts with us.” Since COVID-19, people saw that 211 Eastern Oklahoma provided a wealth of information. “Now there are a lot more subscribing to texts and engaging with our agents more than ever before,” says Ashlie.

Doing More to Help

Due to their success, more non-profit agencies are reaching out to 211 Eastern Oklahoma for texting. “We’d like to explore offering texting to more agencies and subletting out texting services to them,” says Michael. Ashlie’s team is also looking at segmenting their customer database further to make the text messages even more relevant. “It’s nearly impossible to know all the services we offer,” says Ashlie. “Textel allows us to reach people instantly with information that can positively change their lives.”

211 By the Numbers

37

Counties Served

9,864

Services Available

20,000

Text Subscribers

.2%

Text Unsubscribe Rate