

Case Study: AUM

# Pivoting Back to In-Person

Why Auburn University at Montgomery chose to use text messaging to convey social distancing protocols



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## Overview

Today, when a student, parent or faculty member at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) needs information about COVID-19, they don't have to search through their inbox or answer a phone call: They check their text messages.

Every communication— from outreach about COVID-19 tests to timely updates and one-on-one interactions— is conducted via text message, a strategy AUM adopted as an innovative way to meet the challenges they faced when returning to on campus instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, AUM was able to comply with state mandates to have all of its nearly 5,300 students tested for COVID-19 before the start of the fall 2020 semester.

It wasn't always this way.

Prior to the fall semester of 2020, AUM limited its text messaging strategy to emergency alerts. That changed in 2020 when AUM administrators had a realization that would alter the course of their communications strategy: They needed the ability to communicate timely updates with students, and most college aged students don't check their emails regularly or answer phone calls. The changing nature of the pandemic left administrators at AUM with just weeks to create a stronger communications plan. That's where text messaging came in.

Here's what you need to know about how AUM overhauled their communications strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## The Challenge

State and federal reopening guidelines changed rapidly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. While AUM administrators were preparing for an on campus return, they faced roadblocks to doing so safely:

- ✓ **State regulations mandated that every AUM student needed to undergo COVID-19 testing before classes resumed.**
- ✓ **University administrators had just three weeks to contact every student and ensure compliance with COVID-19 testing requirements.**
- ✓ **Email communication open rates had drastically declined: For education and training organizations, the average email click-through rate is 2.90%. Meaning only about 150 AUM students would take action if sent an email.**
- ✓ **Social media, with a large reach, didn't offer appropriate targeting or privacy for these communications.**

"We were in a difficult spot. We weren't sure how to quickly get the word out to all students, both incoming and upperclassmen, when email was our only official communication channel. We knew email wasn't the preferred communication method for undergraduate students, and incoming freshmen wouldn't have access to their school emails yet."

Keri Burnett  
Executive Director of University Marketing



## The Solution

AUM was searching for a communication method with reliably high open rates. Their previous text message provider wasn't reliable. They couldn't count on texts getting delivered and the platform wasn't user friendly. AUM administrators opted to switch providers, using SlickText instead. Here's what happened:

- ✓ **Hassle-free implementation:** AUM sent out their first text message, to the entire study body, within 24 hours of signing up.
- ✓ **Unlimited segments:** AUM administrators could send text messages based on class standing, residence hall, only to students who hadn't submitted their COVID-19 test results, or any other segment they could imagine.
- ✓ **Personalized responses:** Instead of listing generic FAQs on a website or social platform, administrators could respond privately to students about specific concerns.

"Two things immediately stood out to us, even during our 24-hour onboarding period before we sent out our first text: SlickText is web-based, which we loved, and it's extremely easy to segment targets," said Burnett. "Before SlickText, we mainly used email and Twitter to disseminate information. With those two channels, it isn't as practical to segment and maintain one-to-one conversations with specific students who have questions or need additional information."

AUM could send texts immediately because submitting a cell phone number and opting-in to text communication was part of its student application. For those who didn't include a cell phone number, AUM created an opt-in landing page.

## The Results

AUM's texting strategy was popular with students, faculty and university administrators, because people were able to respond immediately and privately with questions and concerns.

- ✓ **A total of 3% of the text list, about 160 people, responded with questions. AUM administrators were able to provide timely, one-on-one answers.**
- ✓ **AUM's text messaging strategy worked so well, they expanded usage for other university-wide communications. AUM segmented messages to new students for new student convocation. The campaign received a 44% click-through rate— five times more visibility than email.**
- ✓ **AUM also held a school-wide scavenger hunt. The campaign earned a 20.1% click-through rate.**

"Honestly, the hardest part about SlickText and text messaging is not overusing it," said Burnett. "It's been such a great partnership and channel for us that we now plan to use it for campus and student outreach as much as possible. So far, especially compared to our email campaigns, we've experienced minuscule opt-outs because our target audience actually wants and enjoys information via text. We're hoping it increases the overall retention rate of students at AUM now that we have better communication channels in place."



SlickText is the leading text messaging platform. Since 2012, SlickText has turned text messaging into a major competitive advantage for companies. Today, over 177,000 customers across North America, including ESPN, American Cancer Society and FedEx, have used SlickText's award-winning software to drive relationships, leverage data, and get results. SlickText has been named a 2021 High Performer by G2 Crowd and is a former Technology Innovator of the Year. The company has dual headquarters in Jamestown, NY and Nashville, TN.

Learn more about SlickText at [SlickText.com](https://www.slicktext.com)

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