

BOT TO THE FUTURE

By Jack Cook

In computer lingo, a “bot” is the nomenclature for a robot program that looks for and reacts to certain parameters of people’s questions. The Russians used bots to affect the 2016 U.S. election. They did this by posting and reposting incendiary political messages on Facebook.

Bots can also be used for tasks other than inflaming passions. Accounting firms can use them to boost their marketing presence and reach potential clients.

The two easiest and most useful bots to make/use are:

- An SMS textbot, and
- A Facebook chatbot.

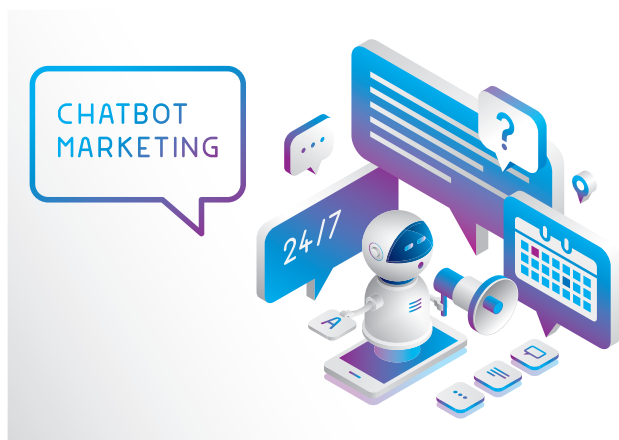
SMS Text Bot

An SMS textbot is a bot that operates over text messaging. A textbot uses a dedicated subscription phone number with a set of keywords that it will respond to. For example, a client sends a text to the dedicated phone number of the textbot that asks, “Does your firm do tax returns?” The textbot will read the keywords “tax returns” and then respond with a preprogrammed message: “Yes, we do tax returns; what type, 1040s, 1120s, 1065s?”

The bot can ask questions to determine the type of return and based on the reply, can make queries appropriate for that type of filing. These types of

bots are encountered when making airline reservations, calling your stockbroker and/or contacting just about any high-volume company.

Having never programmed a textbot before, it took the author about two hours to develop a simple "party" bot. Twilio and Diagflow were used. It cost less \$1.00 per month for the subscription phone number.



Facebook Chatbot

A Facebook chatbot is essentially the same as an SMS textbot, but it operates on a Facebook page. For example, if someone comments on your firm's Facebook page and uses the keywords described above, it can similarly respond.

However, what makes the Facebook chatbot so powerful is that if someone "likes" your Facebook page, the bot can proactively reach out to that person. For example, the chatbot could reach out and ask the following:

"The deadline for filing 1099s is fast approaching. If you need more information or help, just type '1099' in reply and our algorithm can begin helping you with most of the information you need."

The easiest platform to use in programming these chatbots is Chatfuel. After you have programmed a chatbot using Chatfuel, it will prompt you to connect to Facebook. Once you have decided on the message and appropriate keywords, the actual programming process is quite simple. Remarkably, Chatfuel is free for the first 1,000 messages.

Using these types of bots can boost your social media profile, which in turn can boost your client base with very little expenditure.

