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"People have asked, 'Couldn't you just do this on Twitter,'" Phelps continued. "We could, except this is a much more personal relationship. We can show up in the same place as your friend, your mom and your work colleague."

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Readers who sign up for the service receive a text that reads, "Hey. Sam here from the NYT sports desk. I'll be your personal guide to the Rio Olympics (so you don't have to go)...." (Manchester also makes liberal use of emojis.)

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For now, Manchester said he plans to send three to four texts a day. Along with texts, he'll send photos, GIFs, motion graphics and videos, he said.

??GIF????????????????????

There will also be texts that prompt readers to respond with a choice. For instance, "What question should I ask this athlete?" or "Which team do you think will win this competition?" Readers' responses will be placed into groups by a team in New York, and Manchester can then write tailored responses to each group.

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If it works, Manchester said he could envision the service being used for other major events, like the Republican and Democratic conventions and The Super Bowl.

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"Obviously this is foreign territory for me and for us, so we're feeling it out as we go along," he said. "But it feels like a cool way to interact with our people, and to make the Times feel a little more user-friendly."

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