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SMS Or Die

What email marketers need to know about text-message campaigning

Co-authored by Eydie Cubarrubia and Jared Reitzin



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**mobileStorm Inc.
6565 Sunset Blvd. Ste 200**

**Los Angeles, CA 90028
Telephone (323) 785-6333
Facsimile (323) 957-0308**

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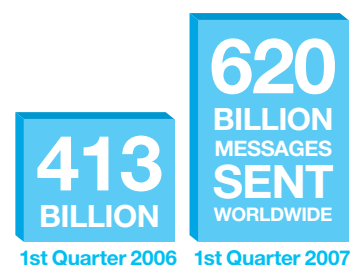




Introduction

Over the past few years, email marketing has become a *de facto* form of communication for companies needing a quick and easy way to reach any number of customers and prospects. Unlike mainstream forms of marketing such as print and broadcast advertising, email offers a sense of personalization to current and potential customers. However, the effectiveness of email has started to diminish thanks to a torrent of spam and the sheer volume of messages through which the average consumer has to wade. Companies therefore must consider alternative forms of communication to reach their intended audiences. Currently, the best alternative is text messaging. Texting is just starting to become a viable option for U.S. marketers and offers benefits that email does not. A brand that disregards SMS could lose potential customers—possibly to competitors who do utilize the technology.

Like email a decade ago, SMS, which stands for Short Message Service (aka text messaging), is a powerful new way to attract consumers. Why? Because consumers are using SMS like never before. According to the research firm Informa, global SMS traffic grew 50 percent in the first quarter of 2007 from the same quarter a year earlier — to a whopping 620 billion messages sent worldwide.¹



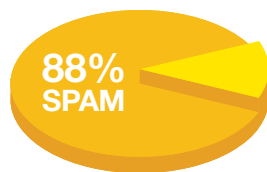
Today, SMS offers companies personalization, relevancy, and immediacy with their marketing campaigns. In the near future, this will be expanded to include location-based services, giving mobile marketers the ability to reach consumers with specific offers tied to their current whereabouts. In addition, SMS allows for a two-way dialogue, making it possible for companies to gather important demographic and psychographic information from willing consumers. Considering all this, it's hard to see why any email marketer wouldn't want to utilize SMS campaigns now and at least begin to build his databases—and be prepared to leverage such campaigns in the future.



In The Beginning

During the rise of the Information Age, email went from being used by a select few in government and education to becoming a widespread form of communication. The business world adopted it as a way for physically-scattered employees to communicate in real time. At first, email addresses were part of a closed network, like the now-defunct Prodigy service and Compuserve. Eventually this changed, thanks especially to the creation of AOL, which let its users choose their own unique email address instead of one that was simply a series of letters and numbers assigned by users' service providers.

Soon Internet service providers (ISPs) started popping up everywhere to meet the explosive demand of consumers wanting to get on "the 'Net" and start emailing. As Internet usage skyrocketed, marketers began tapping into this new world with email marketing. Email was a much more cost-effective and faster way to get out information to interested consumers compared to traditional methods like direct mail, especially when it came to time-sensitive offers. Thanks to advances in technology, email eventually gave companies a way to gauge the return-on-investment (ROI) of a particular campaign by measuring "open-rates," "click-throughs," and especially "conversions." It also allowed them to track such negative events as "bounced messages," which could indicate the pitfalls of certain campaigns.



Total email sent

Unfortunately some marketers decided to take advantage of this new medium and a new, more pervasive form of junk mail was created: "Spam." What began as isolated messages here and there soon grew into a major problem for email infrastructure, with current spam levels reaching epidemic proportions. Secure Computing, an Internet security company, estimated in August 2007 that 88 percent of all email was spam.² This has led to many consumers becoming wary of any commercial email, thereby reducing such messages' effectiveness. In addition, the selling of email

lists continues to worry privacy advocates who believe consumers could have their sensitive information compromised—or at the very least, could find themselves swamped in more spam than ever. These issues could be one reason why, according to the Online Publishers Association, email sites like Gmail and Yahoo! now account for less of Internet users' time online—33 percent of their time on the Web today compared to 46 percent of their time four years ago.

The bottom line is that email marketing, while still a viable option, does not offer today's savvy marketers the broad range of exposure and penetration that is needed to run effective digital marketing campaigns. Enter SMS.



Time spent checking email

Get the "Message"

Those marketers who got email right realized that rather than "batch and blast," their messages should be targeted to the recipient's demographic profile and personal interests. SMS marketers have the benefit of learning from their forebears' mistakes. The technology behind SMS celebrated its 15th birthday this year, and now SMS in the United States is in the same place email was—in terms of being a marketing tool—some 10 years ago.

According to a release from the firm ABI Research, "Mobile marketing has the same potential to change the advertising and marketing space in the same way that the emergence of the Internet did a decade ago." It seems advertisers and marketers believe it, too. ABI predicts that global spending on mobile marketing and advertising will increase thirteen fold between 2006 and 2011, the bulk of which will come from SMS-based marketing.³ Similarly, research firm eMarketer projects that mobile advertising will jump from \$1.5 billion in 2006 to \$13.9 billion by 2011.⁴



Mobile advertising revenue



Meanwhile the cost of mobile marketing is shrinking, thanks to two factors. For one thing, turnkey platforms absorb many of the costs associated with certain aspects of SMS marketing. Secondly, in general, SMS costs about \$0.07 per message, down from \$0.15 just a few years ago, with even bigger discounts being applied for bulk purchases. Improvements in carrier networks and continued use of text messaging will help drive down these costs even further.

There are several reasons why SMS marketing offers advantages over email. Broadly, it's all about the "psychology" of text messages. They reach people wherever they are, at any time of day or night. That gives it a sense of an intimate communication—"the message is right here in my pocket"—which can be further enhanced with a targeted campaign that appeals directly to the consumer.

Due to its very nature, text messaging is imbued with a sense of immediacy to which email can't compare. Mobile phones are with most people almost 24 hours a day, much more time than the average person spends in front of a computer. (Some savvy marketers integrate mobile into their online "shopping carts" so that they can send alerts, specials, or coupons to customers who are away from their PCs.) Number portability means a consumer can keep his or her same phone number while switching cellular providers, making the mobile phone a kind of public IP address for marketers who want to target a specific consumer at a specific time. And SMS is one of the last mediums in which a consumer actually reads all of his or her messages—as opposed to having irrelevant messages automatically directed to "spam" or "trash" folders.

Savvy marketers, then, can use SMS at times when the odds of conversion are at their highest. A restaurant can send out a coupon for lunchtime at 12:05 p.m., just as most people have left the building and are on their way to get something to eat. Or a sports apparel site could send messages to opt-in mobile phone numbers that reside within a certain city just before a big hometown game.

When these messages are sent at just the right time and contain the exact information the recipient is seeking, there's an ultimate sense of relevancy that consumers appreciate. According to the research firm IDC, SMS campaigns that use common short codes (the five- or six-digit number to which consumers send text messages in order to get information from a company or to participate in a contest) can result in response rates of up to 10 percent.⁵ Compare that to response rates of three to five percent for email, and less than one-tenth of a percent for direct mail.



There are two key points here: Successful SMS campaigns are "push" (proactive) rather than "pull" (reactive), and they are part of a brand's overall marketing strategy. Instead of casting a wide net in hopes of catching a relevant consumer's interest, an SMS push campaign relies on consumers acting on their interests themselves. Here's how it works: A consumer will see an advertisement for a brand's short code, text that code plus a keyword (chosen by the marketer to reflect the intent of the campaign or its brand), and receive information.

For example, the MGM Mirage promoted its largest property, the MGM Grand, with a billboard-towing truck. The billboard proclaimed that anybody could be a VIP and get on the guest list to any of their top nightclubs by simply texting the event keyword to their short code (in this case by texting "ROK" to "646629"). The number 646629 actually stands for MGMMAX. MGM Grand licensed this vanity keyword through the Common Short Code Administration (CSCA).

Any business can obtain a random or vanity code and promote it via traditional media like TV, magazines, billboards, and fliers, as well as through new media such as websites and email messages. SMS, then, is a convergence point for all steps of a company's total marketing plan.



Billboard promoting short code





Ins And Outs of Mobile Marketing

While text messaging has become an accepted form of communication to consumers and is relatively easy to use, the technology needed to set up a mobile marketing campaign, not to mention issues of privacy and interoperability, can be daunting to the uninitiated. Key factors include the following:

Short codes:

As mentioned above, common short codes (CSCs) can be used as part of an overall marketing campaign. A shared short code that is random is a cost-effective option since it does not require a monthly hosting fee, but it can limit the ability to create a truly branded solution (though the keywords that consumers are told to send to the code can be specific to a brand). A dedicated vanity short code allows a marketer to have total control of mobile branding and can also shorten the process for sign-up, tracking, and unsubscribing because the code is unique to the marketer's account.

A brand needs to apply for a code from the Common Short Code Administration, located at www.usshortcodes.com. After approval from the Administration, a three-, six-, or 12-month lease on the code can range between \$500 and \$1,000 per month depending upon whether it is a random or vanity code. Then the brand has to activate the code with cellular carriers. All this requires a lot of time and work; it takes carriers six to eight weeks, maybe longer, to get a carrier to provision a code on its network. Luckily, certain mobile marketing application providers can help brands set this up— and can make the process easier, faster, and cheaper.

SMTP vs. SMPP:

Initially, mobile marketing was largely conducted using the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP), which is the same protocol used to send email. SMTP does not go through the carrier network and is delivered to the consumer just like an email message. This caused problems as the carriers were not able to recoup any costs for marketers using their network.

A bigger issue is that since those messages aren't tracked by the cell networks, there is no way to confirm delivery of the messages. In response to the growing demand of text messaging, carriers opened their networks via the Short Message Peer-to-Peer (SMPP) protocol. SMPP includes a per-message fee, like a toll, to connect and send messages directly through a carrier network. However, for the average company the process is very complicated; most carriers won't even allow such a connection for an individual marketer. This concern led to the creation of the SMS aggregator networks via the Short Message Peer-to-Peer (SMPP) protocol. SMPP includes a per-message fee, like a toll, to connect and send messages directly through a carrier network.

Aggregators:

As mentioned above, SMS or mobile aggregators have direct connections to cellular carriers, providing marketers a way to send campaigns via their gateways for a per-message fee. Additionally, aggregators can give marketers a report of successful deliveries (but only for certain carriers), as well as fails or temporary bounces. An aggregator can also provide replies that were sent by subscribers. But this information is often available only for high-volume, premium clients, so the typical SMB (small-to-midsize business) would not want to use an aggregator directly. Fortunately, mobile marketing platforms have pre-established aggregator relationships. Users of these platforms can get the kind of reports that they may not be able to obtain from the aggregator directly.



Costs:

There are two types of costs when considering a mobile marketing campaign. First, there is the cost to the marketer in terms of the per-message fee charged either by the aggregator or the chosen mobile marketing service provider. Again, as noted, the higher the volume, the lower the per message cost. The other type of charge is to the consumer itself. Depending upon a consumer's chosen data/message plan, these can be either "free" (included in the plan) or as high as \$0.15 per message if the consumer has no plan. Because of such charges to end-users, it is extremely important that marketers gain permission to send text messages to a consumer—and that they ensure their content remains relevant to that consumer. Currently, there is talk about carriers providing Free To End User (FTEU) services to marketers. This would allow consumers to receive free text messages from a specific brand. The brand would be charged a larger per-message fee to use this service. Rumor has it that the first types of applications allowed to use this service will be banking and collection notices.

(To learn more about how FTEU will affect marketers, please visit:

www.mobilestorm.com/digital-marketing-blog/free-to-end-user-fteu/)

An excellent place to find more info about SMS marketing is the **mobileStorm Digital Marketing Blog**. Subscribe to blog updates to stay current with mobile marketing techniques and technology.

www.mobilestorm.com/digital-marketing-blog/

Compliance:

The Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) is a global organization that works to establish industry-wide guidelines for mobile marketing, to help stimulate growth of relevant technologies, and to make sure marketers adhere to certain standards. Its members include agencies, advertisers, handset makers, carriers and operators, retailers, software providers, and service providers. Marketers should make sure the platform they use for SMS campaigns are compliant with MMA standards.

In addition, individual cellular carriers have their own set of rules and compliance to which they require marketers to adhere. These are often above and beyond standards set by the MMA and can be very difficult to navigate, particularly if a marketer is using premium SMS in a campaign.

Privacy:

Privacy has become a major concern in a highly litigious society. Therefore, it's in a marketer's best interest to ensure as much as possible that all subscribers are obtained via consumers voluntarily giving out their contact, demographic, and personal preferences information. This is what is referred to as an "opt-in" process. In mobile marketing, opt-in is done when a subscriber either fills out a Web form or sends a text message to a short code/keyword to get on the marketer's subscription list.

The opposite holds true with an "opt-out" mechanism, which lets a consumer who has decided he or she doesn't want any more messages to "unsubscribe" from the brand's mailing list. In mobile marketing, opt-out is done when a subscriber sends a text with the word "STOP" OR "REMOVE," which then allows the subscriber to be automatically removed from a mailing list. T-Mobile requires a STOP notice be part of all text message campaigns that are sent to its subscribers, but it's considered the best practice to have this on all SMS campaigns.



Mobile Phones Remain Dominant

SMS is the savvy marketer's choice for two reasons. First of all, text messages reach a lot more people than do email messages, since many more people have cell phones than they do computers. Forrester Research says there are more than two billion mobiles worldwide but just one billion PCs⁶, while the research firm SNL Kagan says mobile phone penetration in the United States will be 100 percent by 2013.⁷



Over 2 billion mobile phones versus 1 billion PCs

Secondly, widespread phone use coincides with increasingly wider SMS usage, both globally and in the United States. Research firms predict massive SMS volumes for 2010—Gartner forecasts 2.32 trillion messages worldwide; Ovum, 2.83 trillion; and Portio Research, 3.17 trillion. All this means that consumers are ready for, and increasingly receptive to, SMS marketing campaigns.



Handset versus new PC sales

Four mobile phones are sold for every one personal computer, according to the GSM Association.⁸ Income levels dictate that more people can afford a cell phone than a computer, and that's how these people communicate. In a developing nation like the Philippines, 48 million mobile phone subscribers send one billion SMS messages every day, according to the *Philippine Daily Enquirer* newspaper.⁹ In Kenya, it's not uncommon to see a Masai warrior in full regalia with a cell phone strapped to his belt.

SMS in developed economies remains lucrative. According to the Dentsu Communication Institute think-tank, Japan (one of the first countries to adopt text messaging wholeheartedly) has 98 million mobile phone users, and Japanese mobile ad spending will grow from \$328 million in 2006 to \$1 billion in 2011.¹⁰ In Western Europe, where SMS penetration is 90 percent, messaging services remain "vital to operators seeking to differentiate themselves," according to a Cellular-News.com report.¹¹

The United States may have been slow to adopt text messaging, but usage is skyrocketing. In a survey released in August 2007 by the wireless/mobile communications research firm iGr, 84 percent of U.S. mobile workers surveyed said they use SMS.¹² IDC says that common short codes have created a total addressable market of more than 235 million American mobile users.¹³

Consumers are ripe for SMS marketing. "Consumers are not only increasing their acceptance of mobile marketing, but are showing this acceptance through increased participation in marketing programs," Wayne Irwin, president of LogicaCMG Telecoms North American and co-chairman of the MMA's metrics committee, said in a prepared statement. The MMA reports that in a recent survey of more than 1,800 consumers between the ages of 13 and 65, 69 percent said they use text messaging and 44 percent use it daily.¹⁴ "Consumers are becoming increasingly dependent on their mobile phones, and they recognize these devices as being able to provide additional value over just voice," Mr. Irwin added.



Build Databases Now, Use Them In The Future

Think of mobile marketing as a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool. As a consumer initially responds to a campaign by sending a message to a short code/keyword, a marketer also captures his or her cell phone number. Campaigns in the form of quizzes, polls, and questionnaires can gather further information—anything from the person’s zip code (indicating city of residence as well as general neighborhood), to his/her favorite pastimes, to her/his preferred type of food. This valuable information, given voluntarily by the consumer, then can be stored and used for targeted campaigns in the future.

Those who build their databases early will be ahead of the curve when new technology comes to the forefront. As noted earlier, location-based services can enable marketers to target a consumer based on where he or she is physically. Location is determined by cellular towers that can triangulate a user’s whereabouts, or else by GPS (global-positioning satellite) services. Location-based services are expected to come into use within the next few years.



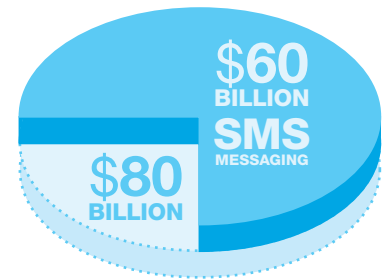
One possibility: A coffeehouse would be able to text-message a consumer a coupon for a discounted latte just as that consumer walks closer and closer to the shop. It’s not a reality yet, mostly due to technical drawbacks and privacy concerns, but a company that builds its SMS databases now will “future-proof” its business in the long run.

Make More Money via Mobile

Besides drawing new customers and adding them to a marketing database, SMS offers additional revenue opportunities. Primarily, companies can make money off premium messaging. Perhaps the best-known example of this is the television show *American Idol*, which allows viewers to vote for their favorite singers via SMS—and to pay 99 cents for the privilege. That translates to big revenue: the show reported that a record 74 million viewers voted last spring during the series finale to crown 2007 American Idol winner Jordin Sparks.

Such messaging is no doubt part of the massive revenue expected to be generated by SMS. Informa estimates that messaging revenue is coming close to \$80 billion worldwide, and that SMS messaging accounts for \$60 billion of this.¹⁵ That’s a big enough pie for cellular network operators and mobile marketers to share.

Note: Any short code can be made premium, but as mentioned earlier, it takes a long time for carriers to approve them. Also, as stated earlier, marketers must be proficient in the standards and compliance requirements of both individual carriers and the MMA regarding premium codes.



Mobile messaging revenue worldwide



Overcoming Reluctance to Mobile Marketing

Admittedly there are still a few challenges surrounding mobile marketing. Such hurdles can easily be overcome, as long as marketers remain committed to using SMS the “right” way and keeping in mind what consumers do and don’t like.




“SMS is too expensive.”

A diverse number of major brands, ranging from Playboy Enterprises to the U.S. Republican National Committee, already use short codes in their marketing campaigns. But as the technology has become more advanced, it has also become cheaper. Certain web-based platforms, like mobileStorm’s Stun!, are available for reasonable monthly fees so that even small- to mid-sized businesses can afford the ability to send and manage SMS campaigns.



“I’m not sure if adoption is strong enough.”

The United States is far behind the rest of the world when it comes to SMS adoption. Therefore many U.S. executives and marketers believe that because they don’t use SMS, their customers don’t either. Usage figures provided in previous sections of this document, however, prove otherwise.



“Won’t they think it’s like spam?”

Responsible marketers know that there should be a double opt-in process when a consumer subscribes to receive marketing texts. For example, if consumers see an advertisement to text-in a keyword to a short code, they should then receive a message back asking if they are absolutely sure they want to subscribe. Likewise, the same process should happen when collecting data from a web form. A message should be sent to the subscribers’ cell phones asking them to respond with “Y” or “YES” to opt-in to the marketer’s database. Only when the consumer responds affirmatively should he or she then be added to the marketer’s database.

SMS messaging is a much easier medium to regulate than email—there are just a handful of cellular service providers and aggregators in the United States, as opposed to millions of servers and IP addresses worldwide. Someone sending SMS spam via an aggregator would get caught and traffic to all carriers would be shut down. It’s clear that SMS spam will not be tolerated—government regulators in countries where SMS is much more mature than in the United States, are cracking down on SMS spammers. For example, Ireland’s Data Protection Commissioner recently raided companies that send unsolicited mass messages to cell phones or that fail to comply with government regulations.



“Smart phones will make SMS obsolete.”

Handsets like Hewlett-Packard’s iPaq phones, which use both Wi-Fi Internet connections and broadband-over-cellular, and Apple’s much-anticipated iPhone make it seem inevitable that mobile Internet will take over all non-voice mobile communications. But SMS won’t soon die out, for several reasons.

For one thing, according to IDC, an extremely small number of wireless users are able to easily access a brand’s content on their own through the mobile Web—but a brand can send rich media to mobile phone users via links in SMS messages.¹⁶ For example, last spring Tenth Street Entertainment deployed a viral campaign in which fans of a band called the Exies could share videos of the group via links within text messages.

Meanwhile, WiFi connections aren’t as widely available as broadband-over-cellular, and the latter can make for slower and less-reliable Internet connectivity than consumers are accustomed to. Plus, plans to bring free WiFi to the masses via metropolitan systems are stalled. Chicago recently jettisoned its WiFi aspirations after network providers demanded that the city become an “anchor tenant” and pay for services.¹⁷ San Francisco—the capital of tech—scrapped its much-trumpeted municipal WiFi network after city officials voted down a troublesome contract with EarthLink.¹⁸

In addition, many consumers merely want phones as two-way communication devices, rather than as replacements for PCs or music players, so they’ll stick with “basic” handsets that have calling and texting capabilities. Therefore, SMS will reach more people than will mobile email or mobile Internet.





Conclusion

Companies of all sizes can integrate SMS into their own marketing strategies, if they have the right tools.

The large enterprise likely has its own marketing department or might have hired an outside marketing agency. Ideally, such departments or agencies should be savvy enough to know about the latest trends, opportunities, and technologies used in the marketing industry. Thus they should be well-versed in the steps needed to create SMS marketing campaigns: how to apply to the Common Short Code Administration in order to get a short code approved, registered, leased, and activated; which aggregators to use in order to send out mass marketing messages over all the cellular networks; and what standards are required, by cellular providers and professional associations, of all SMS marketers.

All this, however, can be daunting for marketing experts who aren't familiar with SMS. In addition, SMBs (small-to-mid-sized businesses) might not have the budget to hire experts for each step of the process. Luckily, turnkey solutions like those from mobileStorm are both affordable and easy to use. These solutions take care of all the different aspects of SMS marketing for the client. Moreover, such solutions let companies have full control over their campaigns and also help them develop databases for future marketing endeavors.

Marketers who want to wage the most effective digital marketing campaigns must use SMS. Consumer adoption of the technology is growing by leaps and bounds, so targeted texts will reach more people than ever. SMS also gives campaigns a sense of urgency and time-sensitivity since text messages reach people wherever they are, not just in front of a computer. New technologies can only help, not hurt, SMS—location-based services will allow text messages to be even more relevant to the consumer, while mobile Internet won't supplant SMS in the foreseeable future. Finally, SMS campaigns allow marketers to gather ever-more consumer information to bolster their databases. Clearly, marketers who choose to continue to ignore SMS will do so at their own peril.



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About mobileStorm Inc.

For nearly a decade mobileStorm has pioneered the concept of digital marketing. Having successfully delivered more than one billion+ messages on behalf of thousands of premier customers such as Qantas Airways, MGM Grand, Palms Casino, Carl's Jr., Squaw Valley Ski Resort, and Horoscope.com, mobileStorm is at the forefront of the digital marketing revolution. The company provides a turnkey, hosted email and digital messaging platform backed by world-class support and expert digital marketing services. mobileStorm has created the most complete digital marketing solution available, enabling you to reach your customers via email, text (mobile) messaging, voice messaging, fax broadcast, or direct mail from a single provider.

For more information about mobileStorm's SMS marketing tools, visit www.mobilestorm.com/sms-marketing

Or to schedule a demo, contact mobileStorm today

866-492-7886
sales@mobilestorm.com

mobileStorm Inc.
6565 Sunset Blvd. Ste. 200
Los Angeles, CA 90028

T (323) 785-6333
F (323) 957-0308

www.mobilestorm.com

