



Generation 2.0

A Practical Guide for Using New Media to
Recruit, Organize, and Mobilize Young People

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TEXT MESSAGING AKA SMS

WHAT IS IT?

Visit any shopping mall, high school, or night club and you'd be hard pressed to find a young person sans mobile phone. The device has become the communications platform, timepiece, and fashion accessory de-rigueur. The ability to send inexpensive short messages between mobile phones has fueled rapid growth in usage and ownership rates.

To demonstrate this growth by way of statistics, over 80% of the world's population owned a mobile phone in 2006.¹ Many countries report more mobile phones than citizens. In the United States, more than 60% of young people regularly send a text message.² By way of anecdote, more people voted for American Idol contestants in 2006 than have ever voted in any U.S. presidential election. Generation2.0 has grown up with text messaging and plies it as a native tongue.

Text messaging goes by several names which refer to the same underlying technology. Its formal name is "Short Messaging System" or "SMS." This term is widely used throughout Europe. In the US and parts of Asia, most people refer to the technology as "texting" or "text." We'll use the terms interchangeably throughout this chapter.

A single "text" consists of a message containing 160 or fewer characters, including spaces. Although some newer phones permit messages of more than 160 characters³, this limit has lingered due to the fact that it remains the 'lowest common denominator.' Some wireless networks will break long messages into 160 character chunks to be sent separately; this method is called "message concatenation." Some networks will simply truncate the message at 160 characters. Unfortunately, not all characters are created equal. Non-Latin alphabet characters, such as Chinese glyphs, gobble up more space. You can only send about 70 of these via text message.

Despite these confines, organizations and individuals have used text messaging to achieve a variety of organizational objectives such as outreach, recruitment, fundraising, and mobilization. The remainder of this chapter describes categories of usage, the technology's inner workings, and how to get started once you've decided to move forward with a text messaging campaign.

HOW IS IT BEING USED?

PEER TO PEER MESSAGING

"Whr R U?"
"@ class. Bck @ 3"
"K. Meet me@ 4 @skateprk"
"K"

The wide majority of text messages zip between person A and person B delivering pithy questions and responses in a shorthand lingo⁴. Users appreciate the technology's immediacy, low price point, ease of use, and asynchrony. In other words, it's easy to shoot out a text while

¹ http://files.ctia.org/pdf/CTIA_Survey_Year_End_2006_Graphics.pdf

² Get reference from Pew Internet research study

³ It's actually a combination of phone and wireless network that permits longer messages.

⁴ It's interesting to note that one wireless carrier has a bug in its message sending program; it often sends message twice. To avoid billing complaints, the operator removes all identical messages sent within a given timeframe (10 hours for instance) from the bill. They are desperately trying to fix the bug because they estimate that they are losing millions of dollars in revenue. Many of the stripped messages are not, in fact, duplicates. People tend to the same message again and again within a short timeframe. Eg: "Where R u?"

driving, talking, listening to music, or doing just about anything. For young people who have grown up with the ability to focus on several activities at once, it's an ideal communication platform.

VIRAL TXT-POWER MOVEMENTS

Around 2001, just as texting reached the tipping point in many countries, massive political demonstrations started to arise as a result of viral text messages. Gloria Arroyo swept into power after crowds of approximately 700,000 people gathered at Manila's People Power shrine to demand the end of Joseph Estrada's corrupt regime; most crowd members reported hearing about the rally from a friend via text. Similarly, in December 2002, text messaging was instrumental in the election of South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun. When election-day exit polls showed that Roh's opponent was winning, hundreds of thousands of Roh's supporters mobilized friends to vote via text messaging and Roh edged out a victory. After the 2004 Madrid bombings, officials banned demonstrations in the 24 hours preceding the upcoming election. Spanish citizens used text messaging to organize impromptu demonstrations and to spread the following message:



Protesters organized by SMS in Manila, 2001.

"The government lied. Pass it on."

Thousands arrived at the protests and the incumbent, who was ahead in the polls before the bombings, lost the election. Many credit text messaging with fueling the quick political turn around.

This type of spontaneous organization is now recognized as a potent political force. As proof of its power, worried government officials have shut down wireless networks during elections to avoid outcome-changing "txt-powered" events. For example, Cambodia's National Election Committee banned texting from March 31st to Election Day on April 1st 2007. The local committee chairman stated that political parties could "use SMS services to send messages to 20 or 30 people at a time to galvanize them to vote for their parties" which might result in "destroying the calm." True enough.

Texting changes the dynamics of mass political movements. Like a flock of birds synchronized by silent signals, crowds respond dynamically to compelling information. They gather in a flash, disperse in an instant, and shift the balance of power. These rare mass movements form organically around sui generis political events. Organizers (and advertisers) have attempted to create viral txt-powered movements, but these canned events have not shown results.

Targeted protests, on the other hand, have seen positive results. Greenpeace Argentina used their SMS network to quickly organize a demonstration outside Government Houses in Buenos Aires. Over 300 people showed up, dressed like penguins (to mock the Argentinean President) as per the text message instructions. Oscar Soria, one of the organizers says of the effort:

"Using SMS to mobilize people on the ground, in the forests and in the cities in an extremely powerful tool because you are able to reach so many people in one moment."⁵

⁵ <http://www.personaldemocracy.com/node/756>

MAKING "OLD MEDIA" INTERACTIVE

In the United States, text usage grew more slowly than abroad. The laggard's pace was due primarily to the fact that many US citizens had access to the Internet and E-mail via personal computers. With access to quick and cheap communication via email, text messaging didn't sell quite as well to the American populace.

The television show "American Idol" catapulted text messaging into American consciousness by allowing viewers to vote for contestants via text. Old passive media suddenly became interactive. The mobile phone became a pseudo-mouse for the television. Viewers were enabled to affect the outcome of the show simply by pressing a few buttons. They didn't even need to stop watching the show to participate. Usage reached an all-time high in 2006 at 64.5 million text votes.



American Idol Text Message Statistics

Enabling this type of remote interactivity has become commonplace, especially outside of the United States. Printing a text-in number on television, billboards, taxi-tops, and newspaper ads allows the advertiser to offer an instant response mechanism. Inspired by a call to action, people respond on the spot while enthusiasm runs high.

RECRUITMENT

Old media becomes interactive. Now what? Television shows like American Idol use texting to make their content more engaging. Most non-profits and political campaigns are more concerned with growing membership ranks. It turns out that text messaging provides an extremely simple and inexpensive method to do just that.

The minute a person texts-in, you've captured their phone number. You've also got a direct connection to that person no matter where or when they roam. Most organizations utilize this direct connection to gather additional demographic data such as name, mailing address, and email address. This data is then used in conjunction with traditional outreach mechanisms to convert a person into a card-carrying member.

In order to recruit a new member, an organization needs to effectively promote their text-in number (otherwise known as a "shortcode" – see definitions below). Like any advertising campaign, the call to action can be promoted using any of a variety of media including newspapers, web sites, television, radio, and live events.

Live events offer a particularly compelling scenario. At any given event or congregation of people, about 80% of the crowd will have a mobile phone in his or her pocket. In April 2005,

Bono stopped his shows and asked the audience to text "ONE" to his text-in number in order to join his anti-poverty and AIDS campaign of the same name. Immediately after texting, participants' names were scrolled across a giant screen. At each concert, an average of 10,000 responded. Via a series of follow-up texts, the campaign also gathered email addresses and now uses this to cull donations and to stimulate further action.

During the immigration rallies across the United States in 2006, the SEIU made the following announcement from the podium in English and Spanish.

"If you care about immigrant justice, text the word "Justice" to 50555."

After the text-in, the respondent would receive the following text response:

Reply w/ email & get SEIU text & voice info on immigration reform. No email? Send name instead. Standard txt rates apply. Reply 'end' at any time to opt out

If the user replied with email address, they were sent an inexpensive follow-up via email. If they sent only a name, an SEIU representative would call the person back.

Text messaging allows campaigns and organizations to turn any gathering into a low-cost recruitment event.

PETITIONS

To recruit new members and to simultaneously generate media buzz, organizations run text-based petitions. These initiatives function similarly to recruitment efforts, but call to action is crafted around a single issue. True to petition form, the organizers will then forward the final list of respondents to the press, relevant prosecutorial party, and government officials.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare ran a very successful newspaper campaign in support of their "Stop the Seal Hunt" initiative in the UK. According to organizers, print ads achieved a 1/2% response rate with a total opt-in of 50,000. When asked to reply with their name, 92% responded and 68% responded with their email address.



Print Advertisement for IFAW's Stop The Seal Hunt with Text Message call to action

BLASTS

"We've got 20,000 phone numbers. Let's blast them!"

This author and many of his colleagues in the mobile field have been approached numerous times with such a request. While an email blast might be as easy to send as falling asleep on the "Enter" key, text blasts require a bit more planning. In particular, the wireless carriers place a handful of regulations around "opt-in." When implemented effectively, text blasts can galvanize a mobilization effort. The Greenpeace anecdote above demonstrates effective use of text blasting.

In order to send a text to any given phone number, the wireless carriers require that the intended recipient has opted-in to receive text messages. The opt-in can be acquired in several ways. The recipient can mark a box on a paper form or web site. Alternatively, after responding to a call to action via text, the recipient can be given an opportunity to opt-in (and must be informed about opt-out methods). As long as these criteria are met – as long as the organization has effectively conveyed the scope of their mobile program to the end-user while providing ample opportunity to opt-out, the carriers will permit texts to be sent to this user – using the blast method or otherwise.

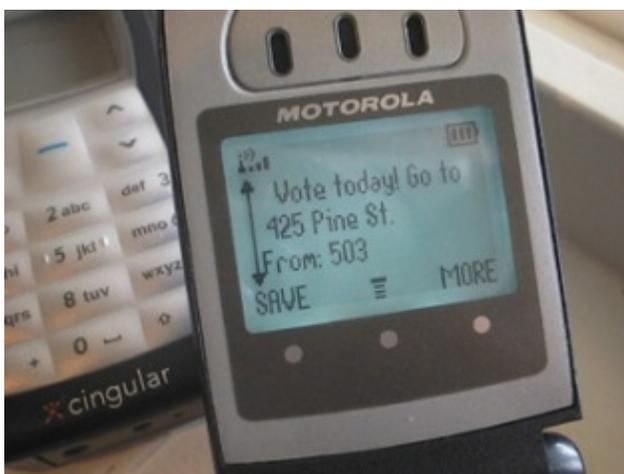
Of course, the carriers can't monitor every text to every user. They operate on a complaint basis. An organization (or the vendor supporting that organization) risks having service cut after a single end-user complaint. Understandably, vendors take opt-in very seriously and will ask a lot of questions to ensure that your list of mobile numbers is "clean." If you're collecting mobile numbers via web site or in-person, it's a good idea to proactively add a checkbox that says something like: "I want to receive information via text message." When your organization is ready to implement a text blast, opt-in won't be an issue.

After confirming that the list is clean, an organization must then decide upon an effective blast strategy. Although text spam is not yet widespread, the thoughtful organization will send texts with restraint and should ensure that each text blast contains information that makes use of the mobile format to add value. A message such as:

Don't forget about our annual holiday party next month

doesn't add a whole lot of value; it doesn't take advantage of the mobile specific characteristics like immediacy. A message such as:

Vote today! Your polling place address is 425 Pine St.



provides a compelling call to action along with valuable data. A message in this format was blasted out to 14,500 opted-in people on Election Day 2006 by a team of organizations and Yale researchers. Preliminary results show a strongly correlated positive result.

ALERTS

Text alerts refers to texts that are sent on a subscription basis. Many private sector companies sell subscriptions for a monthly fee. For example, you can sign up for a daily horoscope, sports scores, or harry potter trivia. Alerts have been very slow to take off in the United States, but are popular elsewhere. This slow growth is largely a result of the US pricing model which charges

more per message than other countries, which means that users are required to pay for the subscription in addition to the per message fee.

To this author's knowledge, alerts have not been used very often in a political context. Again, pricing is a barrier – even if the subscription were free, most young people do not want to pay their carrier's per message fee for messages of this sort. When asked in a survey if they'd be interested in receiving frequent text alerts about the election, 90% of young people delivered an emphatic "no!"⁶

The same carrier driven rules apply to alerts as to any other form of texting. If your organization wishes to send frequent text alerts the user must opt-in specifically to the alerts campaign. In other words, you need to tell them how many messages they will be receiving, at what times, and for how much. An example opt-in message follows:

To opt-in to the Mary Chase for Senate text alerts campaign, reply "y" – you'll receive one text per week. Reply "end" to opt-out at any time.

TEXT TO VOICE

Don't forget that the phone can make voice calls too! Some of the most compelling campaigns combine text blasting with voice. It can be as simple as including a phone number in the body of a text message. Most phones will provide the end-user with the option to dial an embedded number.

Although it was never "activated," People for The American Way's Massive Immediate Response system drew a lot of media attention and put some politicians on edge. In 2005, the Republican Senate majority threatened to invoke the so called "Nuclear Option" which called upon an obscure procedure to shut down Democratic Filibuster. The prospect of this procedure distressed the left-leaning PFAW. They used their web site to gather mobile phone numbers from their constituency. On the signup page, they promised to send a text message containing the phone number of the Senate switchboard and asked all recipients to immediately bombard their senators with calls. The "Nuclear Option" was never enacted and the thousands of people who signed up weren't texted, but the event certainly demonstrates the potential power of a text to voice campaign.



Graphic from PFAW's MIR web page

Tying text into an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system offers even more flexibility and power. IVR is the technical term for a voice driven menu – the kind that drives you crazy when you call the phone company, tech support, or any large corporation. IVRs have been used creatively and in conjunction with text to offer value to the end user.

For example, in Africa, Fahamu decided to make audio recordings of their popular Pambazuka newsletter. They built an IVR around these audio recordings that allowed users to press 1 to hear the article on land rights and 2 to hear the story on a women's rights initiative and so on. They then sent out a text blast to thousands of members saying:

A new audio version of Pambazuka news was just released. Call [number] to listen to it by phone.

This application used a quick text message blast as a hook into more immersive media. See the chapter on Internet Telephony for more information about IVRs and voice possibilities.

⁶ Get this reference.

FUNDRAISING

The prospect of raising funds via mobile phones has most organizations chomping at the bit...until they learn about wireless carrier commissions. Using what's called "PSMS" or Premium SMS, you can add a charge to a user's phone bill by text message. Example message flow follows:

Can we add a donation of \$4.99 to your phone bill? Reply "y" if it's OK to charge this amount.

If the user replies in the affirmative, the amount goes onto the user's bill and at the end of the month, the total amount collected is sent to the organization...minus the carrier's commission. Commission fees range from 40-50% of the amount. Growth of text-based financial transactions has been significantly hampered by this extraordinary commission rate.

At times, and hopefully as a harbinger for the future of non-profit fundraising, the wireless carriers have agreed to waive their fees. The Red Cross raised more than \$100,000 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina after the carriers agreed to eliminate their standard commission. The success of this program galvanized the Red Cross to establish a permanent disaster response text donation initiative called Text2Help:

In the event of a major disaster the American Red Cross will collaborate with the CTIA to activate the Text 2HELP initiative. At that time, subscribers of participating wireless carriers can send a text message to "2HELP" (24357) containing the word "HELP." A \$5 tax-deductible donation will be made to the American Red Cross for disaster relief efforts. Donations will appear on the customer's monthly bills or be debited from prepaid account balances.

Astounding results can be achieved when partnering with a wireless carrier. In Austria, for example, Doctors Without Borders worked with Mobikom to text 500,000 of their customers asking them to opt-in to receiving telephone calls pertaining to Asian tsunami relief. 60% of recipients opted in and 50% signed up for a monthly giving plan. The initiative raised €282,000 billed directly to customer phone bills.⁷

Offering compelling incentives can also generate impressive results. In July 2005, the Live 8 concert promoters launched a ticket lottery where participants could apply for a ticket and make a donation by sending an SMS. The promotion created a media storm, over 2.1 million text-ins, and £3 million for Live 8 charity projects.⁸

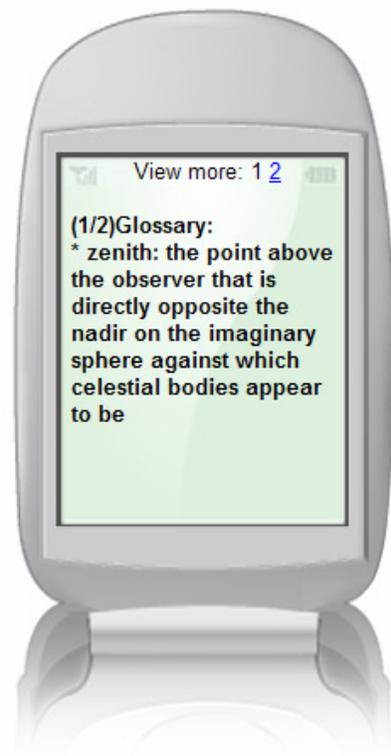
Until the carriers reduce their fees, the best usage of mobile fundraising may be to hook a supporter with a small initial donation. People who donate once to a campaign or organization are likely to do so again. Using texting in this way is more akin to recruitment, with a call to action that incidentally raises a small amount of cash.

INTERACTIVE SERVICES

Recently, organizations have been using text messaging to offer interactive services. These services turn the mobile phone into an internet device. They allow users to request and retrieve data much like a web site. The advantage of using text, however, is that these interactions can take place anywhere and anytime. Of course, people who do not own computers can also participate – this fact is often used to make the point that texting bridges the digital divide.

⁷ Mobile Active 3

⁸ [http://www.brandrepublic.com/bulletins/digital/article/479891/nearly-21m-](http://www.brandrepublic.com/bulletins/digital/article/479891/nearly-21m)



Service offerings range from simple to complex – just like web sites. On the simple end of the spectrum is Google Search. If you text a search term to GOOGLE (466453), Google will reply with a list of search results. For example, if you text the phrase “define zenith,” you’ll receive the response pictured on the previous page. Just as you’d expect, it’s Google but via text message.

Organizations, especially outside of the United States, have used texting to provide all kinds of services such as banking, voter information services, up to the minute public transit information, flight times, and dating. Almost anything that can be done on the web can be done via text. *However*, given the 160 character limit, the difficulty of typing on a mobile phone and the inability to validate data before it is sent to the server, most applications become impractical. The most successful applications require very little typing and a minimal number of end-user responses.

The author’s 501c3 nonprofit nonpartisan organization, Mobile Voter, ran a text message based voter registration campaign called “TxtVoter” that pushed the limits of text-based interactivity.



Advertisement for TxtVoter on World Wrestling Entertainment’s website⁹

The following call to action was advertised on TV, billboards, web sites, flyers, and at concerts.

“text [keyword] to 75444¹⁰ to register to vote”

After which, the following interchange would take place:

User texts [keyword] to 75444

“Thanks, now reply with your full name and address OR email address to get a voter registration form”

User replies with either full name and address or email address.

“Thanks! You’ll be getting your voter registration form soon”

voter registration form. If the user replied with a name and address instead, our mail house custom printed and pre-filled out a voter registration form and mailed it to the new voter.

If the user provided a valid email address, we’d email them a link to a web site where they could fill out, generate, and print a

We provided the service for free to any organization interested in registering voters. Organizations were able to define their own keywords so that they could brand and track their own campaigns. Approximately 200 organizations used the service prior to the 2006 US Election.

⁹ It’s fascinating to note that people responded enthusiastically to web advertisements. I.e. people texted while sitting in front of their computers.

¹⁰ Note that we mention the shortcode “75444” frequently throughout this book; it is the code leased by the Author’s organization, Mobile Voter. The shortcode is fungible, however. It’s safe to assume that any shortcode can be used in its place.

As you can see, this campaign consisted of many moving parts. The most challenging aspect of the campaign was motivating people to respond to the call to action. We experienced, on average, a 1% response rate. However, within 1 week of the registration deadlines, response rates increased dramatically. See the best practices section for more ways to create effective campaigns.

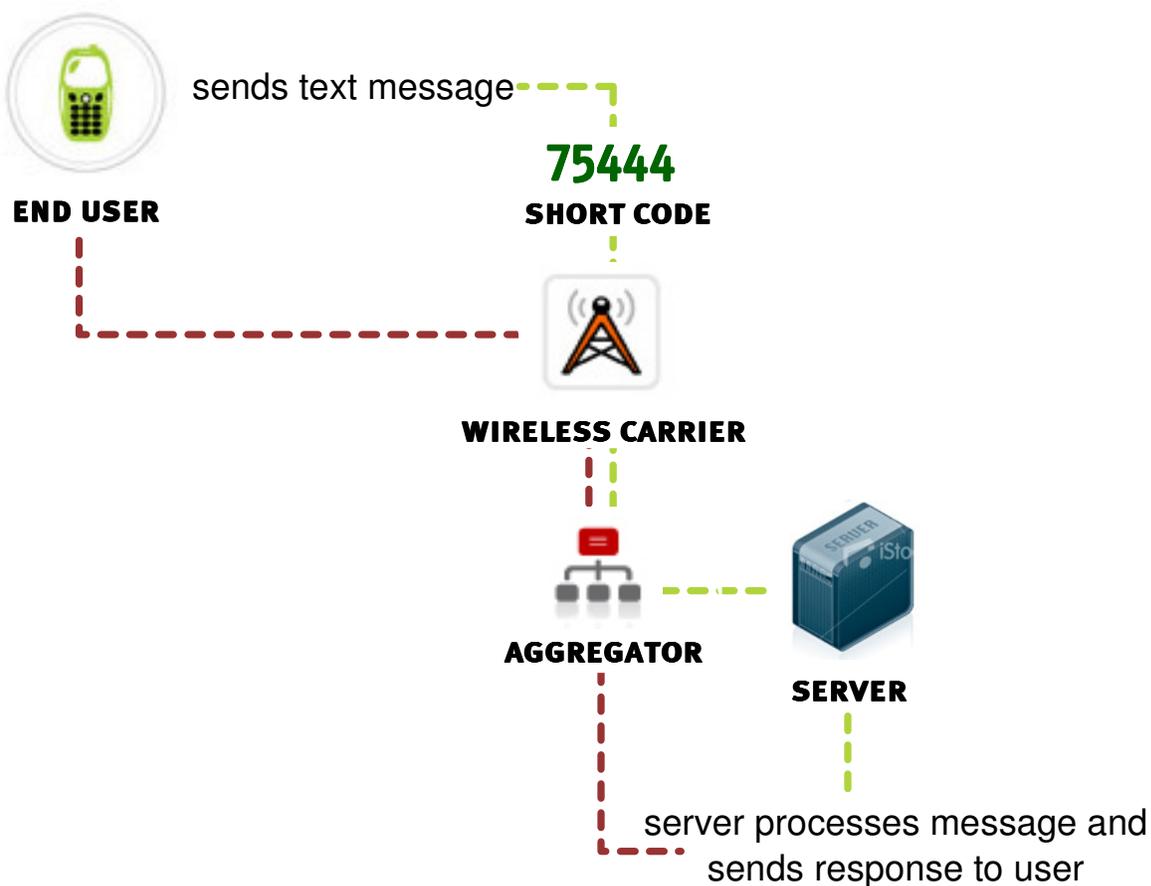
How Does It Work?

To understand how text messaging works, it's useful to learn a few common terms:

Wireless Carrier or Wireless Operator	The business that sells wireless service to consumers such as Sprint, T-Mobile, O2, Vodafone, Rogers
End-user	You and I. People who use mobile phones.
Handset	A mobile phone such as a Nokia 5220.
Shortcode	A 5 or 6 digit code that works a lot like a web address. E.g.: 75444. End-users can send texts to a Shortcode. An organization (such as yours) can send messages to an end-user by specifying the Shortcode as the return address.
Aggregator	The business that routes text messages to and from shortcodes.
Keyword	Most text-message campaigns make use of keywords; they ask end-users to text [some keyword] to [some shortcode]. Keywords provide an easy tracking mechanism. It's simple, for example, to see how many people responded to Flyer A with keyword "signup" as compared with Flyer B that specifies keyword "join."

The diagram below illustrates how a message is sent from an end-user to a server and back again. The server is intended to represent *you* – or the vendor you hire to work on your behalf. The server is where you define the logic specific to your campaign. For example:

- If user texts keyword "join" to shortcode 80837, respond with the following message:
"Thanks for joining! Please reply with your email address to enter to win the prize."
- If user then responds with an email address, send the following message:
"Thanks for sending your email address. We'll email you to let you know if you've won."
- Or, if the user *does not* respond with a valid email address, send the following message:
"Doesn't look like you sent a valid email address. Please do so, or we'll just call you to follow up."



Unlike almost any other form of media, text messaging offers an easy method for precise tracking. Every time a message is sent or received by the server, the server logs the following information:

- time and date
- end-user's phone number
- body of the text message

This information, especially when combined with keywords, enables detailed tracking and reporting. It becomes easy to determine which messages, tactics, and locations are most effective. For example, a campaign can run two television ads with different keywords. Within minutes of running the spot, the campaign will know which ad was more effective. The same technique can be used on flyers, newspaper ads, billboards, among volunteers, or in any scenario that lends itself to A/B testing.

If you're working internationally, it's important to note that shortcodes and most aggregators are regional. The organization that administers shortcodes in the US and Canada, for example, is called the Common Short Code Administration (CSCA). In England, it's called the Shortcode Management Group (SCMG). Most countries have their own administrative body; codes will not work across countries.

WILDCATTING

If you play by the books, you'll use the system described above. If you're a hacker, there are a couple of other texting options worth mentioning. Before SMS was accepted as a standard, wireless carriers used email to convey messages from one network to another. It's still possible

to send a textual message from one phone to another using email. However, you've got to know the recipient's carrier in order to construct the proper email address which is in the format:

phonenumber@carrierTextGateway.com

The [carrierTextGateway.com] address is different per carrier and isn't consistently formatted across carriers. T-mobile's address is tmomail.com and Sprint's is messaging.sprintpcs.com, for example. If your friend Franchesco has a T-mobile account and his number is 415.622.9288, you can send a text message to his phone by sending an email to:

14156229298@tmomail.com

The disadvantage of this method is that; if the carriers notice that you're sending a lot of emails, they may (and have in the past) reject all requests from your Internet Service Provider. If you're also sending messages using the official shortcode method, they may rescind your right to use that shortcode on their network. Another disadvantage is that most users will not be able to respond to your text message unless their handset supports email. These disadvantages are offset by the fact that it's free (!) and works across all regions.

The second wildcat method entails using your phone and laptop as a makeshift text message gateway. Some phones, such as the Nokia 6210 and 7110, will connect to a computer and will function as modems. As such they can receive and send text messages. Several desktop applications, notably FrontlineSMS, have been written to take advantage of these phones' capabilities. FrontlineSMS offers a suite of features that allow you to create and manage complex SMS campaigns. Throughput is low and your reception may be spotty, but it's a great application for organizers in the field or in countries where the official method is non-existent.

HOW TO GET STARTED?

As with any technical project, finding the right solution depends upon objectives, requirements, and budget. Complex projects that require integration with legacy databases will most likely necessitate hiring experts and/or creating a custom in-house solution. Simple tasks such as sending out a text blast to a list of phone numbers can be easily handled by a no-frills web-based service provider.

As in any field, the number of options can be overwhelming. The options break down into three general categories:

- Sign up for a web based service provider
- Hire a mobile vendor
- Do It Yourself (DIY)

Web based service providers have been popping up in recent years to serve just about any need and mobile is no different. After providing your credit card numbers, you'll be on your way. Most of these services charge a small set up fee and per message fees on the order of \$0.10USD/message. Unfortunately, once you get beyond the basic functionality, you'll need a technical person to help configure the options and to guide you through the process. In addition, \$0.10 adds up very quickly! The author has yet to see a very simple and inexpensive web-based text offering.

Given that you'll need to work with a technical person, and assuming you don't have one on staff, the option that will make most sense is to hire a mobile vendor. This type of vendor specializes in providing text message services. They will guide you through the array of options and will provide bulk per message pricing. Typically, they will charge a monthly fee in the range of \$1000 - \$3000USD per month and about \$0.06/message.

Finally, there is the DIY option. For highly technical organizations, the cheapest long term solution for very custom work may be to build a texting application from scratch. This route is neither easy nor cheap. It requires taking the following steps:

- Reserving a short code: \$500-\$1000/month¹¹
- Setting up an account at an aggregator: ~\$500/month + per message fees of about \$0.035 + ~\$850 set up fees.
- 2-6 month wait time for campaign approval
- Coding of message processing application: \$5000 – infinity
- Ongoing maintenance and carrier compliance.

The following matrix may help in the decision making process:

Initiative	Difficulty	Recommended Solution
Blasts	Easy	Online Service or Mobile Vendor
Recruitment, Alerts, Petitions	Easy - Medium	Online Service (but only if your organization has technical resources) or Mobile Vendor
Fundraising, Text to IVR	Medium	Mobile Vendor
Interactive Service	Hard	Mobile Vendor or DIY
Wildcatting	Easy – Medium	DIY

Refer to this book’s website for an updated list of mobile vendors and online services.

BEST PRACTICES

Texting is still in its Wild West phase. Organizations try new types of applications, user interfaces, and business models every day. Umbrella organizations such as the Mobile Marketing Association and MobileActive.org have developed lists of best practices, but they are very much in flux as the technology evolves. Refer to this book’s website for links to industry standard best practices. The list below presents highlights from these lists and also from the authors own experience.

Deliver a clear and compelling call to action

As with any advertising campaign, the end-user has got to be convinced that texting your shortcode is a good idea. You’ve got to make the value proposition clear and strong while simultaneously delivering your shortcode and keyword.

Use a trusted messenger

Young people will respond by an order of magnitude higher when the call to action is delivered a trusted and charismatic individual. In the author’s experience, rates increase from around 1% to near 40% in some cases.

Offer an Incentive

People, especially young people, are driven by incentives. They’ve got to have a reason to text your shortcode. Signing up for a mailing list isn’t usually enough. Signing up for a mailing list and winning a backstage pass sounds better. The best incentives leverage the instantaneous nature of texting. A backstage pass now is better than a chance to win a trip to Hawaii later.

Make it Simple

As this author discovered in his own work, complex interactions require a lot of handholding.

¹¹ Shortcodes in the US cost \$500/month, payable in 3 month increments, for a “random” code; the numbers are chosen at random by the CSCA. For \$1000/month, the CSCA allows you to choose your own numbers.

Unless you want to spend a lot of time cleaning data, use texting as a hook, and then get people involved via other outreach mechanisms such as email or a phone call.

Incorporate Texting into Your Overall Campaign

Texting does not operate in a vacuum. Use it to support and supplement your other campaign tactics.

Create a Continuous Feedback Loop

When you start to get data from your texting campaign, ensure that you can act on that data. Tweak your campaign on the basis of these results, try different messages, and hone your campaign to maximize results.

LOOKING FORWARD

Mobile phones are quickly evolving. Texting has been the only application that works reliably across a majority of handsets. This fact still holds true. However, advanced features are trickling down to the lower-end phones owned by most young people. If Apple's iPhone makes as much headway as its iPod, the mobile landscape will change dramatically. Full featured mobile web browsing will then be possible and will open up many new avenues for en-situ civic action.