Reaching your Audience in 160 Characters

If you are trying to reach communities of color or youth, you can't ignore mobile outreach. Studies show that these communities access the Internet and social media channels using their phones at high rates. But they aren't the only ones.

Audience Targeting

The average person looks at his or her phone 46 times every day. So it's no surprise that open rates for text messages range from 97-99 percent, compared to 16-24 percent (depending on which study you look at) for email. Higher open rates lead to higher action rates which is why mobile is worth considering for your organization.

As always, start by asking: who are your target audiences; where are they found and what do you want them to do? Spitfire's Smart Chart® can help you think through these questions and incorporate mobile into your overarching communication strategy.

Mobile Terminology

Sending mobile messages is immediate and allows an organization to rapidly respond to an issue and quickly mobilize supporters. Before you get started, it is important to understand a few terms when considering a mobile program.

Short code

This refers to the five or six digit number that people text to join an organization's text messaging list. In the image example below, **62227** is the short code. Short codes in the U.S. are administered by the Common Short Code Administration (CSCA). There are two main types of short codes, common short codes and shared short codes.

JOHN LEGEND JOINS THE FIGHT TO RESTORE THE VRA. TEXT **LEGEND** TO **62227.**

A common short code is registered to one organization, like NAACP's short code in the example to the left. In this particular case, the short code is a vanity code because it spells out NAACP (62227). An organization that has its own short code can create as many keywords – or words that a mobile phone user would text to the organization's short code to join their list – as they like to encourage their audience to join their mobile program. Common short codes are registered with the CSCA which charges $500-1000 lease fee each month ($500 for a random short code and $1000 for a vanity code).

A shared short code is a type of common short code but is typically registered to a mobile vendor and shared among the vendor's clients. While there are charges for the number of text messages an organization sends, this often saves the organization the monthly lease fee for the code. However, organizations are limited in the number of keywords they can set up since they share the same short code with others.

Keyword

This refers to the word that a mobile phone user would text to the organization's short code to join their list. In the example left, **LEGEND**, is the keyword. Keywords allow the organization to segment their list by the way or reason someone joined the list, which language they prefer or what issue they care about.

Rules of Engagement

Organizations should work with a mobile vendor, in the same way they do to manage their email list, in order to send text messages to their supporters. Unlike email however, mobile is regulated in different ways than a typical email program and it's important to understand these differences:

1. An organization cannot just add someone to their list if they have the person's cell phone number.
2. The user must opt-in by either texting a keyword to the organization's short code, or entering their cell phone number via a web form.
3. If the user joins via a website, they will be sent a welcome text message asking them to confirm that they do indeed want to join.
4. The first text message sent must include guidance on how the person can unsubscribe from the list.

Best Practices

Once you've registered for a short code, use these best practices:

- Avoid long periods of down time between text messages. Subscribers may forget they are on the list. Aim to send a text message to supporters weekly or biweekly but no more than once a week. As with any list, monitor you unsubscribes and action rates. Your supporters may want more or less messages. Every list is unique.
- Always identify the organization or campaign in the text message. The text message appears to be from a phone number in the subscriber's inbox. Identifying the organization in the message will remind them who the message is from.
- Make the messages interactive. Make sure you choose a vendor that allows your users to reply to messages so they don't feel like they are receiving messages from a machine.
- Integrate a sign-up button to join the mobile program on your website or any other online channel with a sign up form.
- Pitch your short code at events to capture the audience and ask them to join. The pitch to join should include a strong call to action instead of a simple "join us."

Ways to Use Mobile

There are a number of ways that an organization can use mobile.

Educational messages: Trivia is a good way of spurring engagement with the list. Send trivia questions to subscribers during down times when the list needs to receive a message and give them multiple choice answers to respond.

Calls to action: Ask list subscribers to make phone calls or sign a petition in support of an issue or campaign.

News/events: Send updates or promotional announcements about upcoming events, encouraging subscribers to attend. An organization can also quickly alert its network to breaking news relevant to subscribers.

Poll your supporters: Interactivity is important for mobile programs. Send a poll to supporters asking them what the most pressing need is in their communities or their opinion on a particular issue.