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PRESS RELEASE

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Mobile marketing

By: Dr Pieter Streicher, MD at BulkSMS.com

Around the world, people are increasingly conversing using SMS, and making fewer and fewer voice calls, particularly in the youth market. A recent *Washington Post* article looks at how the “texting generation doesn’t share boomers’ taste for talk”. Increasingly consumers are having interactive and effective asynchronous conversations, even though they are not in real time, via SMS.

So why, wonders Dr. Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com, are so few companies really engaging with their customers via this channel. He’d argue that still too often the mobile component of a marketing campaign will be tacked on at the end, rather than being carefully considered during the design process, and so the immense power of mobile marketing is being stunted.

We know there is a rapid shift happening in how brands interact with consumers: from one-way, top-down communication, to an ongoing conversation between the consumer and the brand. Instead of broadcasting messages, brands need to focus on listening to consumers. By giving consumers a voice, brands have the ability to adapt their messages and products to give their customers what they really want.

So it’s clear, as a brand you need to join the conversation with your customers who are talking to each other via 160 characters. But so many mobile marketing campaigns are hinged on a once-off response from the consumer, with very little thought given to how to continue engaging with them.

Once a trusted personal relationship has been developed with an audience, the brand is in a powerful position to start soliciting feedback from clients on a range of topics, including: their experience of the service provided, their suggestions on improving the product or client recommendations on how to use the product. Input can be responded to directly or published online and shared with the brand’s wider community. Loyal brand ambassadors can be identified and rewarded, by seeing their ideas implemented or via gifts or other benefits.

So for instance, a food-related brand could also offer a series of free recipes via text instead of simply running a “text-to-win” style competition. This ongoing engagement gives the consumer a compelling reason to opt into the communication, and allows the brand to build a trusted relationship with the consumer, and then benefit from feedback and input from a loyal customer base. (If anyone thinks you can’t deliver recipes in 160 characters or fewer, take a look at <http://twitter.com/cookbook>). Likewise a sporting brand might offer customers a free weather service via text for customers on the go, and a financial services company could provide free market information in real time.

Typically an SMS engagement needs to be triggered via another channel, for instance a TV ad, display ad or a billboard. This is why it is so important that the mobile marketing component be considered at the outset of a campaign, while it is being designed, in order to ensure this ongoing engagement. In fact, Streicher maintains that mobile marketing is the key to elevating a marketing activity from an isolated campaign to an ongoing conversation with customers and potential customers, via a medium of their choice.



Other benefits of the mobile phone as a marketing channel are that these devices have become such an essential part of many people's lives and even part of their identity (think of the popularity of customised ringtones and logos). Studies show that people would rather forget their wallet at home than their mobile phone. In addition, the cost attached to sending an SMS protects the channel from the deluge of spam that we experience via email.

The flipside to these benefits and the trust you can build up via this personal device, is the potential to do your brand massive damage if you get it wrong. Make sure you adhere to legislation and best practice around opting in and out of databases. Tell your customers what they are signing up for and then deliver on that promise.

The message is clear for brand owners: your customers want a conversation via a medium of their choice. Make sure your marketing team or agency has the skills, experience and understanding of the mobile space to design this engagement from the outset. It is the businesses that strike up the best conversations that are going to be the most successful in growing their customer base.