

## The Rise of the Mobile Phone

We touched on one of the impediments of using ICTs in the South (developing countries) for educational purposes being the low level of Internet connectivity. Despite the substantial impact of computers at telecenters the entire internet penetration in the South is still hovering around 10%. This low penetration is partly due to the high costs of connectivity, a lack of telecommunication infrastructure and widespread illiteracy (both digital and reading). In addition, in many countries internet prices are artificially high due to government sanctioned monopolies.

The digital divide of the internet is being offset however with the rapid growth of mobile phones in the global south. Internet access is being achieved through 3G (third generation) phones as a far more practical method of accessing information. For a graph on mobile phone subscriber growth, please see this link: <http://tinyurl.com/2438de>

## The SMS generation

SMS (Short Message Service) is increasingly used in developing countries as a primary mode of communication. The ease of usage has replaced many computer-based email systems in countries lacking the internet infrastructure.

- In March of [2005](#), SMS was one of the communications forms used to garner support for the Lebanese political rallies.
- During the [2004](#) Philippine presidential elections, short message was a popular form of electoral campaigning for and against candidates such as incumbent president [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo](#) and main contender [Fernando Poe, Jr.](#)
- During the 2004 US Democratic and Republican National Conventions, protestors used an SMS based organizing tool called TXTmob.
- In India, SMS is being used by schools and colleges to send information about exam results and people can send an SMS to their favorite temple in order to request a prayer

The recent surge in mobile phone usage and newly learned culture of SMS usage has created a ripe opportunity for SMS campaigning.

## Considering SMS Campaigning

Organizations that are considering a SMS campaign should treat the technology like any other tool used for messaging and should be used as part of an integrated campaign. A few rules of thumb can be applied when considering SMS technology

- **Does your campaign have a direct call to action?** Using SMS as a newsletter approach is disastrous. Effective Campaigns have clear targets and methods for people to take action
  - Example: Greenpeace Argentina recently won the 2006 Mobile Messaging Award for their zero Waste Campaign. Greenpeace used SMS to recruit participants and organize rallies in support of a campaign to decrease the waste created by Buenos Aires. The campaigners were asked to

send SMS messages to key decision makers at crucial moments in the legislative process. The government agreed to reduce urban waste by 50% by 2010 and by 100% by 2020.

- **Can you reduce your message?** Effective SMS campaigns deliver small pieces of information over a course of time. If you don't have the ability to condense your message, SMS might not be the tool for you
- **Can you provide valuable content?** The best way to think of an effective SMS campaign is to imagine yourself as a user and ask yourself, "Would I sign up for this service?" To be effective you'll need to provide some sort of valuable information for people to read. Maybe its smog alerts, or baseball scores or traffic information. Whatever it is, your rule should be to provide up-to-date information that people would want on their phones

### **Some usages of Mobile Phones**

- **SMS** – Send up to 160 characters of a text message
- **Ringtones** – Offer unique ringtones associated with a campaign
- **Short Codes** – Use a code that could sign up your members to a SMS or email list
- **Fundraising** – Raise money directly from a phone bill
- **Forward to a Friend** – Encourage supports to forward text messages to increase awareness

### **Best Practices**

**International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)** launched a campaign in Spring 2006 across the UK to create a popular groundswell against the Canadian practice of seal hunting. The campaign used a number of outlets including mobile phones ([www.stopthesealhunt.com](http://www.stopthesealhunt.com)). The strategy focused on mobilizing as many people as possible in one month to petition the Canadian government on a bill to stop the seal hunting. The campaign messaging included a five-digit mobile short code that allowed individuals to opt-in to the petition. Over 50,000 people participated in the mobile petition with a 68% opt-in rate for email addresses.

**Fahamu** (South-Africa based NGO) joined a coalition of human rights groups supporting ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The protocol protected a wide array of women's rights but needed to be ratified by 15 countries in the African Union. Fahamu with their partners launched a signature campaign in 2004 with mobile phone users being able to text their signatures to be reflected in the final figures. Fahamu developed software to handle incoming SMS text messages. The petition collected 4,000 signatures with 500 text messages and the protocol was in fact ratified in November 2005.

**Questions to consider:**

- Other examples of successful Mobile Phone campaigning
- What kind of information would be most valuable to ask for in order to have more effective campaigns?
- What aspects of mobile technology have not yet been fully tapped to incorporate into campaigning work?

**Other Resources**

- [http://groups.dowire.org/groups/research/files/f/13411-2007-03-21T170331Z/Prospects%20for%20e-Advocacy%20in%20the%20Global%20South\\_Jan\\_07.pdf](http://groups.dowire.org/groups/research/files/f/13411-2007-03-21T170331Z/Prospects%20for%20e-Advocacy%20in%20the%20Global%20South_Jan_07.pdf)
- [http://www.witness.org/vhblog/2007/02/mobile\\_advocacy\\_still\\_bleeding.html](http://www.witness.org/vhblog/2007/02/mobile_advocacy_still_bleeding.html)
- [www.mobilevoter.org](http://www.mobilevoter.org)
- [www.mobileactive.org/guides](http://www.mobileactive.org/guides)