

Third Screen Applications

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This paper discusses the potential and applications for third screen – mobile phone – for businesses of all sizes. Mobile phone usage has become very common among all ages and trades. According to the CTIA – The Wireless Associate®, there are over 239 million mobile phone users in the US alone.

The computing power and advanced display screens combined with powerful wireless networks at an affordable monthly price have attracted many businesses to start developing and using applications on their mobile phones. Unlike TV and PC, mobile is virtually always ON, has no cords, is easy to carry, and stays with the user anywhere they go. Generally when an adult leaves home he or she carries three things: car keys, a wallet or purse, and a mobile phone.

According to Jupiter research, (Nov, 2006) in 2006, mobile entertainment revenue worldwide had reached about \$17 billion and was expected to become \$47 billion by 2009. North America contributed about 14% to this total in 2006 and is expected to contribute 19% by 2009. This means the mobile entertainment sector has generated about \$2.3 billion in 2006 in North America alone with the potential to grow to \$8.9 billion by year 2009.

The untapped market is the focus of this paper, which is related to mobile applications beyond entertainment. While mobile ring tones, wallpaper, ring-back tones, music downloads, video such as YouTube, and social networking services may continue grow, the common usage of text messaging as an application for businesses and consumers will evolve because of its cost effectiveness, creative use of technology, and convenience. For instance, peer-to-peer text messaging is at an all time high in the US among the consumers, however, businesses are yet to adapt to the usage of text messaging applications as commonly as email.

Per the CTIA (Mar 2007), for the United States there were about 93.55 billion text and MMS (picture) messages sent or received in Q3 and Q4 of 2006. That means about 19 billion messages per month changed hands. In addition, there were about 199.9 million SMS or text messaging capable phones in the hands of US consumers, 63.4 million camera or MMS capable phones, and 99 million US subscribers are actively using wireless data by the end of 2006.

The following are some text messaging based mobile applications for businesses:

Msg (message) Me (Businesses contacting customers and employees, customers contacting businesses): This is a broader area of mobile text messaging applications for businesses of all sizes. It is generally conceived as a web-based service to allow customers to notify or reach out to particular contact by sending a text message without the customer actually having to know or remember the mobile number to send text message to.

For example, a potential or existing client can on go to a financial services company's website, click on 'Call Me', and provide their contact or call back number. Instantly, a text message will be sent to the right individual or team's mobile phone(s) within the company. The company can then call back to the phone number provided by the client. Such a quick

turnaround will continue to help companies acquire new clients as well as support its current clients. This is far better than a system where a client submits a 'contact us' form, which sends an email to company's info/contact mailbox and sits there for 12 – 24 hours before some one can access and respond to it. Speed is the key to satisfied customers and to attracting more business.

Another simple application of mobile messaging for businesses is allowing its customers to register their mobile phone number(s) to receive alerts and non-spam notifications such as: package delivery confirmation message, product recall alerts, service due alerts (i.e. from auto service providers), doctor's appointment reminder text messages, rent payment reminders, insurance and other bill payment reminder messages, prescription ready-to-pickup messages from pharmacy, business meeting reminder notifications, birthday and other important date reminder messages, requested or reserved movie or book availability alert messages, emergency notification to client and employees, and so on.

(We have intentionally left out sales alerts, mobile coupons and discount code type applications as there is a separate paper that discusses those in greater detail and their effective and result oriented usage.)

Mobile interactive applications for businesses are another potential area where businesses can get instant feedback, response, votes, etc. from their customers and employees. Some of these low-cost effective applications include surveys from employees (or close group of customers) via mobile text messaging. It is not a 20 - 30 question survey but is instead a short (1 – 3 questions) interactive survey with an incentive to become part of a drawing or sweepstakes. Such a survey application for mobile is a paperless, easy to conduct, non-invasive way to get information from customers or employees who have little desire to fill out extensive paper or online surveys.

Similarly, interactive voting via mobile phone text messaging among employees or customers regarding a person (employee or customer of the month), product, policy, or price is another very effective way that an application can help businesses make instant decisions based on interactive and instant responses from employees and customers. This saves turnaround time, gives the notion to the customer or employees that they are directly involved in the decision making process, is easy for people to do, and helps businesses to grab employees and customers' attention instantly.

In conclusion, there are many simple and instant third screen (mobile phone) applications being developed or currently available that can help businesses to engage employees and customers more effectively and instantly, by using a better and affordable means of communications. However, to continue to use such instant means of communication a business must maintain and follow standard policies against spam.

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