



Neustar® Guide to Smart SMS Marketing

mGovernment: How Government Agencies Can Use SMS

A white paper on the benefits of SMS to local, state and federal government agencies in their communication with citizens

A **Mobile Marketer** presentation

INTRODUCTION

Why SMS for government

The general availability of SMS — those 160-word characters exchange on mobile phones — from the most basic handsets to the most feature-rich makes text messaging the lowest common denominator for information dissemination. Moreover, citizens don't need smartphones or expensive data plans to remain informed.

Put simply, the key benefit of SMS to local, state and federal government agencies is the ubiquity of SMS — nearly 100 percent of mobile phones can support — and the high likelihood of text messages being read soon after receipt.

In this white paper, we will discuss how SMS can help government disseminate information quickly and to a wider base of population. Under-served segments of the population, especially in terms of Internet access and other information-delivery mechanisms, can also be reached using SMS.

As mobile phones overtake landline service in many homes, permission-based mobile communications becomes even more critical for both government and business.

Since most consumers have their mobile phone within reach and keep the device always on, government agencies can make public information and government services accessible to the population anytime and anywhere.

For example, SMS is an ideal communications tool to disseminate emergency information during natural disasters, terrorist attacks or service outages. Both government and citizens can benefit from the use of SMS in these cases to save lives or seek information on official services.

Another benefit of SMS is the two-way communications that is achieved with the general population.

Indeed, SMS offers a simple and effective way to communicate with government agencies to voice opinions or receive additional services. This opens the door for citizens to have their voice heard and effect change in the services they receive and the direction of government.

Going long on short codes

As the mobile messaging leader, Neustar helps brands, advertisers and government agencies connect with mobile users through its partnership with CTIA — The Wireless Association, the leading trade association for wireless carriers nationwide.

Through the carriers' Common Short Code Administration at <http://www.usshortcodes.com>, Neustar enables marketers and government agencies to lease five- or six-digit common short codes. These short codes then allow the leaseholders to communicate with their constituencies via SMS and selected keywords. Contact us for your short code needs at sales@usshortcodes.com.

The SMS opportunity for government agencies is immense. SMS not only improves communication between government and citizen with speed, but also cuts down waste. It is the ideal tool for mGovernment in an age when every citizen is mobile.

This white paper will spell out the SMS opportunity and offer definitions on common short codes and keywords. The document will also supply tips on how to set up and deploy an SMS program for government agencies, as well as track and measure the performance of those efforts.

Several case studies showcasing SMS' use by governments throughout the world and nationwide will support the case for mGovernment across the 7,000-plus taxing jurisdictions nationwide.

We wrap up with best-practice tips.

It is our hope that you enjoy “mGovernment: How Government Agencies Can Use SMS.” This is one in a series of white papers produced to offer a roadmap to smarter SMS outreach. Enjoy the text.

Diane Strahan

Vice president of mobile services
Neustar

Mickey Alam Khan

Editor in chief
Mobile Marketer and Mobile Commerce Daily

HOW KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES NATIONWIDE USE SMS

Several federal, state and local government agencies have found SMS a useful tool to communicate with citizens. SMS has helped in police work, emergency management, tax returns, lottery, diplomacy, transportation, library work, parking meters and health.

Below are several case studies of how government put SMS to good use, as reported in Mobile Marketer.

Federal

Internal Revenue Service

The Internal Revenue Service ran its first mobile campaign during the 2009 tax season aimed at the Generation-Y demographic to promote its Free File tax program.

Tapping direct marketing services firm Harte-Hanks and Low + Associates for the “What’s Your Best Free” campaign, the IRS used a mobile Web site and SMS alerts.

The campaign’s goal was to inform participants about the Free File program, a partnership between the IRS and the Free File Alliance that offers free federal income tax preparation and electronic filing to eligible taxpayers.

To this end, banner ads appeared across social networks’ sites and other Web locations with the call to action of texting the keyword BEST to the short code 62407.

Once taxpayers texted in the keyword to the short code, they received a return text message that linked the recipient to the mobile Web site where they were able to participate in a poll about the “Best Free Thing.”



Users could download wallpapers representing some of the most popular free things, enter and submit their own Best Free Thing, send the campaign to a friend and opt-in to receive weekly alerts with new submissions.

The wallpapers were updated throughout the campaign to include some of the popular responses.

Some of the Best Free Things submitted were ringtones, family and friends, holding hands, sunlight, air and mother’s love.

Brand messages appeared throughout the mobile site experience, informing the user about the Free File tax program.

More than 30 percent of the participants opted in for the text program, and more than 20 percent used the send-to-a-friend feature.

Mobile was one of the ways that the IRS could reach young taxpayers, given the early adoption of mobile and text messaging in those age groups.

Department of State

The Department of State put SMS to diplomatic use in the summer of 2009 when President Obama visited Africa and the Middle East.

Highlights of the president’s remarks to African and international audiences were texted in real time in English and French. Enrolled participants could text in their feedback to the State Department which then posted them online at the America.gov site.

Supported by Clickatell’s technology, this “mobile town hall without borders” was open to citizens outside the United States. Highlights from the president’s speeches in Accra, Ghana, and Cairo, Egypt, were broadcast thus.

African citizens interested in receiving the speeches’ snippets via SMS could enroll directly through their mobile phone by entering a specified mobile service code number, depending on their African country of origin.

The State Department promoted the program locally in Africa on radio stations and in embassies, on Facebook, Second Life and through public relations outreach to local African newspapers.

The two-way SMS nature of this campaign emphasized the mobile town-hall-style nature to great effect.

President Obama

It can be said that the 44th president fully understood the power of SMS to deliver the White House.

Using the vanity short code 62262, which spells OBAMA, candidate Obama and his campaign team rallied supporters and Generation-Y voters to put him in the White House.

While exact details of his SMS database were not disclosed, Mr. Obama chose to announce the nomination of his vice president pick — fellow Senator Joe Biden — through a text that went out to an estimated 2.9 million opted-in SMS subscribers. That was a first for the United States.

Team Obama also used the 62262 short code to call the faithful to rallies where Messrs. Obama and Biden were to appear. SMS was used to rally supporters to caucuses and primaries, to volunteer, to donate and to vote in the presidential elections.

While SMS alone cannot take credit for making Mr. Obama president, it definitely gave him an edge over rival candidates within his own party and ultimately outside.

The campaign team used other media such as email and the wired Web, as well as the Obama Mobile mobile site to encourage voters to opt in to SMS alerts.

Once elected, Mr. Obama's presidential inauguration committee also used the 56333 short code to encourage supporters to volunteer for service projects nationwide. Here's what one message said Jan. 15, 2009:

"Help President-elect Obama renew America w/ service projects around the Inauguration. Txt SERVE to 56333 for info. For Inauguration updates txt HISTORY to 56333."

To those responding to the message, here's what was returned:

"Welcome to updates about the President-elect's commitment to service <http://USAservice.org>. Txt HELP for help & STOP to quit. Standard rates apply."

Texting HISTORY to 56333 yielded another a reply with a request for more targeted information:

"Welcome to Inauguration 2009 News & Updates. REPLY with your ZIP CODE for local event updates. Txt HELP for help, STOP to quit. Std charges may apply."

Once the ZIP code was texted in, the return SMS directed the individual to Mr. Obama's inauguration site:

"Thank you for updating your zip code. To learn more about the Inauguration visit www.pic2009.org."

The site at <http://www.pic2009.org> was Mr. Obama's site geared to raising funds for the Inauguration Jan. 20, 2009.

Meanwhile, several hours after receiving the first text message encouraging service and then exchanging various text messages, another message was received Jan. 18:

"Thanks for volunteering this weekend & renewing America. For info on local events visit USAservice.org. REPLY to this msg & tell us about your service project."



State

New York State Emergency Management Office

This New York agency is deploying free SMS services through NY-Alert, the state's All-Hazards Alert and Notification System.

Assisted by mobile messaging service provider Sybase 365, the New York State Emergency Management Office seeks to keep New Yorkers up to date through their mobile phone.

The Web-based portal allows state agencies, county and local governments, emergency service agencies and institutions of higher learning to provide emergency alerts and private notifications to a defined audience through SMS alerts.

Prior to the development of NY-Alert, it used to take up to an hour to use all of the technology available to get the word out, but now it's a one-stop shop for the state.

The state agency creates the message once and launches it simultaneously on 17 gateways, Sybase's SMS platform being one of them.

The agency does a lot of two-way SMS communications, but the unique thing about NY-Alert is that it's not a single-channel notification system. NY-Alert was designed to be a multifaceted alert system.

There are 160 different categories and events within NY-Alert, from a missing child to a broken pipe to an amber alert to transportation issues. The agency asks sister New York agencies such as the Department of Transportation, the Department of Criminal Justice and the State Police to provide information for the alerts.



The New York State All-Hazards Alert and Notification is a Web-based portal that is part of New York State's efforts to provide New Yorkers with information so that they will understand the risks and threats that they may face and know how to respond accordingly.

The Web portal contains critical emergency-related information including instructions and recommended protective actions developed in real-time by emergency service personnel.

Of the 4.7 million NY-Alert subscribers, 2.3 million have provided their mobile numbers to receive text messages.

The entire State University of New York, which comprises 64 campuses, and the entire City University of New York system, use NY-Alert.

The mobile alert notification system, which Sybase claims is the largest nationwide, is a free, subscription-based offering that lets consumers register multiple devices from which they want to receive alerts.

The Sybase 365 SMS platform lets subscribers receive emergency information such as major road closures, severe weather events and protective actions recommended by state, local governments and universities, all through their mobile device.

These notifications will include severe weather warnings, significant highway closures, hazardous materials spills and many other emergency conditions.

Additionally, New Yorkers can find information regarding response actions being taken by local and state agencies and protective actions that they should take to protect themselves, their family and their property.

The New York State Emergency Management Office is using the short code 692578 for the NY-Alert system.

When someone texts in to the agency's short code, she is sent a text message with a URL to the NY-Alert Web site where New Yorkers can subscribe for notifications by providing their email address, mobile phone number and fax number.

The agency claims to be increasing its SMS subscriber base by 10,000 users per month. It sends out an average of 110,000 text messages per day, the bulk of which are transportation and severe weather alerts.

New Jersey State Library



Targeting teens, the New Jersey State Library used SMS to collect inspirational quotes from residents of the state. The New Jersey State Library partnered with mobile CRM expert Gold Mobile to launch a boom titled “H2H [Human to Human] Wisdom in 160 characters.” The campaign was created to support the National Write Your Own Book Month.

SMS was combined with Facebook, Twitter and traditional Web pages to plant the seeds for a viral movement. Mobile played a key role simply because teens who are not Twittering, Facebooking or emailing are primarily texters.

Participants could submit their contribution by texting the keyword H2H followed by a space and their words of wisdom to the 51684 short code.

Once opted-in, these participants who included a first name or initials could have that information published along with their quote. Texts could not exceed 160 characters. No profanity or personal references were allowed.

The SMS campaign ended once the State Library reached its imposed limit of 50,000 words. Opted-in consumers received a response to let them know that their submission was accepted.

Also, those consumers whose entries were accepted would receive once-weekly SMS alerts about the books and the State Library.

The month-long campaign ended Nov. 30.

The completed book will be available online.

Maryland Lottery

The Maryland Lottery turned to mobile marketing to drive more ticket sales from consumers within the state and outside as well.

The opt-in messaging program includes announcements on jackpots, promotions and new games. The one thing the mobile program won't do is allow actual gaming on a mobile phone since it is not permitted in the state.

The Maryland Lottery is combining a strong radio presence, text, WAP and specializing applications with SMS to become a poster-child for state lotteries nationwide. Acuity Mobile created the application.

As with many other mobile marketers, the Maryland Lottery is using a phased approach — start with SMS to build a mobile database and then transition over to targeted WAP sites and custom applications.

Phase one is meeting expectations. Thousands of active users on the SMS service text the keyword PLAY to the 635688 keyword (it spells MDLOTT) to receive up to seven messages per month on hot lottery topics and promotions, as well as jackpot announcements and winning numbers.

While several states offer basic lottery services by text — winning numbers, for example — the Maryland Lottery program is among the first to deploy a complete offering across SMS, WAP and applications.

SMS is ideal for lotteries based on the ubiquity and the personal nature of the medium.

Lottery players are highly loyal and have an ongoing need for information such as keeping abreast of winning numbers, jackpot sizes, new games and retailer locations.

Moreover, many players don't have access to a computer. Their mobile phone is their computer.

Having all this information in the player's pocket makes SMS a key piece of a state lottery director's marketing strategy.



County

Orange County (CA) Transportation Authority

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) has launched a text-messaging program to reduce call-center volume and costs.

Powered by marketing service provider ExactTarget, the public transportation agency's addition of text messaging lets passengers send a bus stop number and route number to the short code OCTAGO to receive arrival times of the next three buses for that stop.

The SMS program is expected to reduce the nearly 2,000 bus status and route inquiries received daily, reducing total call-center volume by as much as 25 percent.

OCTA's "Text for Next" program not only provides an easy and convenient option for people to access bus schedules, it also helps mitigate the ever-rising cost of the agency's call center.

OCTA is a multi-modal transportation agency serving Orange County, CA, with countywide bus and paratransit service, Metrolink rail service, the 91 Express Lanes toll facility, freeway, street and road improvement projects, motorist aid services and by regulating taxi operations.

The Text for Next initiative is targeting OCTA's bus customers. OCTA's bus system operates with 80 bus routes and carries more than 210,000 boardings per day.

According to a recent customer survey, 75 percent of OCTA's bus customers have mobile phones and 64 percent use text-messaging capabilities. The bus customer's average household income is around \$30,000.

The text-messaging program is designed to give OCTA customers added flexibility to confirm bus schedules on-the-go while reducing the agency's overhead expenses.



The immediacy of text messaging cuts costs and increases OCTA's efficiency by communicating schedule changes as they occur, faster than its team can access the 6,500 bus stops around the county with revised printed materials.

The agency's Text 4 Next program relies on ExactTarget's triggered messaging to automate SMS responses to customer inquiries and builds on the agency's email marketing initiatives powered by ExactTarget.

OCTA is getting the word out about the SMS platform via on-bus communication, email communication, social media sites and outreach to bus customers at major bus stops.

City

New York Police Department

Using SMS to report crimes or suspicious activity to city police departments would seem natural to most citizens. The New York Police Department gets that.

In addition to calling **1-800-577-TIPS**, New Yorkers can text-in crime tips anonymously by texting the keyword TIP577 to the CRIMES (or 274637) short code.

It is a trend that is catching on elsewhere.

Transit police in Washington, DC, launched a program to test the effectiveness of an effort allowing mass-transit riders to send in tips or report crimes by texting on their BlackBerrys and mobile phones.

International

Government agencies overseas have found equally creative use of SMS. Among the many uses of the channel are voter-turnout calls, municipal tasks, property taxes, immigration alerts, motor vehicle registration confirmation and service outages. Here are some outstanding uses of SMS by governments across the world.

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WHAT ARE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES OVERSEAS DOING WITH SMS?

India



Text plays a key role in a vast country such as India, which has more than 400 million mobile subscribers.

Not surprisingly, the local and central governments have recognized the power of SMS.

Take Pune, a city two hours south of India's commercial capital of Mumbai. The Pune Municipal Corporation is letting citizens find out details about their property tax bills through an SMS service.

Per the trials, citizens have to enter the keyword EAA, leave a space and then type in the property number and text it to the 54646 keyword. Details of the tax will be sent within seconds to the user's mobile phone.

Pune residents can already pay their property tax online. There are plans now to send property bills on mobile via SMS and then let the recipient pay online.

On a county level, the collector — who is the civil servant administering the area — has made public his mobile number. Residents of Guna district in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh can send SMS messages if they have complaints about service at government-run institutions and agencies.

The complaints can range from government employees not coming into office on time, functioning of the county administration or midday meals not being served in schools as required by the law.

Posters with the collector's mobile number have gone up at public places within the urban and rural areas of Guna.

The goal is to use these SMS alerts to help citizens keep the county officials on their toes especially in implementation of government schemes relating to education, health and government services.

Meanwhile, a state government in India will send out SMS alerts to 3.4 million families — 60 percent of the population — when their 50-pound monthly allotment of rice at subsidized rates is available for pickup.

The Philippines



This Southeast Asian country is one of the most advanced in its use of SMS for government services.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue lets Filipino taxpayers file their income tax returns through an SMS service called PAYBIR.

The tax agency has partnered with an accredited agent bank and a taxpayer agent to allow citizens to pay income tax through SMS.

Indeed, the country's government has SMS hotlines for departments of the interior and local government, agricultural commodities, weather, environment, finance, energy, foreign affairs, SARS and disaster management, as well as for jobs, prices, traffic, child rights and travel.

Malaysia



The Malaysian government has certainly made life easier for its residents with its mySMS portal.

The portal serves as a two-way communication between the public and government agencies for SMS exchanges on inquiries, information, reminders and payment. The agencies include those dealing with driving licenses and road tax expirations, foreign trade, small business and housing loans.

Oman



The Middle Eastern Sultanate of Oman is highly active in its use of SMS to inform citizens of service outages or caution them against unacceptable behavior.

For example, the state-owned telecoms firm Omantel recently sent this SMS to its subscribers:

“Omantel announces to its valuable customers that the mobile service to Boushar, Al-Ghubra & Khuwair has been affected due to electricity cut-out from some transmission stations at these areas. Omantel apologizes for any inconvenience that has been caused to this unexpected electric failure.”

Omani residents can subscribe to Omantel services such as airline information and alerts from the Muscat Stock Exchange. These text messages can be received in English as well as Arabic for calls to participate in the population census or for alerts on water cuts and power failures.

On days when it rains heavily — which is rare, given that Oman is mostly desert — the National Committee for Civil Defense, which is the governing body for emergency and disaster management, sends out an SMS such as this:

“Despite the low precipitation yesterday, some casualties were recorded due to some people’s venturing through wadis. We exhort you to be extremely cautious. NCCD.”

And then, of course, there is the SMS reserved for admonitions. Sample this one sent recently by the Telecom Regulatory Authority to Omantel subscribers:

“Dear Customer,

“Please avoid disturbing other subscribers in purpose of buying their special numbers. Any subscribers involved in such practice will be subjected for legal action.”

Why was that message sent? Say someone has a special number such as 9999999. People call that number and offer to buy it mainly for its vanity value. What angers the telecoms authority is that most of these vanity numbers are owned by Oman government ministers.

Meanwhile, Oman Mobile has partnered with the Ministry of Civil Services to introduce an SMS job announcement service for vacancies in the public sector.

Available through the 90226 local short code, subscribers pay a nominal fee to receive details about public sector jobs, exam dates and locations, interview dates and location, and final nomination status.

Both post-paid and prepaid subscribers can use this service for six-month subscription period and then renewed.

In addition to job search and details, the subscriber can also apply for a job by SMS.

United Kingdom



Security concerns have convinced the London police to include text messaging in their terrorist-alert pager system.

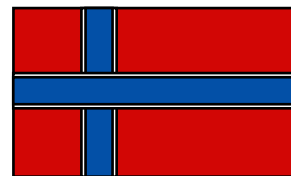
On a local level, the West Devon Borough Council is using SMS along with other channels for service delivery.

Users are asked to enter a mobile number and email address. The details are confirmed with the user with a return SMS message before the account is updated.

The council is using SMS to inform citizens of planning applications.

SMS is also used in local elections, along with electronic voting options. Of course, questions of secrecy and security still nag in this area.

Norway



The tax authority in Norway has launched SMS tax returns.

Norwegian taxpayers who have no changes to make to the tax returns sent by post can send an SMS message rather than returning the form by mail.

An estimated 1.5 million taxpayers who normally send the tax returns back by mail are said to benefit from this SMS service.

Estonia



The Estonian city of Tartu is running a project named Tartu mCity that aims to make life better for its citizens through mobile services related to civic functions.

Tartu mCity is a collaboration involving the city municipality, local and foreign companies, universities, public institutions and other mobile-minded cities in Europe.

Indeed, Tartu mCity uses mobile for paying for parking, buying bus tickets, tourist information, parent-teacher communication, neighborhood watch and the municipal maintenance hotline.

Finland



One of the pioneers in SMS billing, Finland now allows tickets to be bought by SMS for the public transport system in the nation's capital of Helsinki.

Riders can order tickets by sending an SMS message to the transport system. The ticket is delivered by SMS as well. The rider pays for the ticket through her mobile phone service bill.

South Africa



Eskom, the South African electric public utility, and other municipalities are using a mobile wallet from MoPay that offers real-time electricity pre-pay meter recharge.

Powered by Sybase 365, the SMS-based electricity voucher scheme enables the distribution of free basic electricity tokens to low-income households. These tokens are sent by SMS to registered meter owners.

Use of this service eliminates a half-day roundtrip to the bank.

MoPay also targets villages with free communications, free SMS between schools and parents, and free content for schools and students — a boon in communities otherwise strapped for funds.

Department of Labour's Immigration New Zealand



Immigration New Zealand (INZ) realized that a large proportion of calls to its call centers were about the status of work permit applications.

INZ chose to create and deploy an SMS update service that would reduce costs and workload.

Work permit applicants who had provided their mobile phone numbers — which was taken as permission to contact them via that medium — were sent information on the status of their applications, per a white paper by consultants Joanna McLeod and Lucy Weston-Taylor. Here's an example of an SMS sent:

"Hi Leo. We go your Work appl, no#6527865 on 03/09/2007. We aim to process this in 30 days. Immigration Manakau Branch."

Inbound texts from applicants are discouraged and nor are they sent a reply.

Also, to ensure security, the text messages contain only the first name, acknowledgment of an application and where it was logged. Hence, there is not enough data for malicious use of that SMS from the government agency.

Immigration New Zealand worked with SMS service provider Datasquirt's technology since it integrated SMS with email — a major plus for the agency.

The immigration agency found that the SMS program took only one-fourth of a full-time employee's time to run.

Also, the program was cost-effective. Per the agency, the program cost less than \$35,000 per year to run, while the same service through outbound calls and letters would cost between \$430,000 and \$720,000 annually.

Feedback from immigrants was good. Eighty percent to 90 percent of those asked said they made fewer calls to the call center because of the SMS facility, and almost all approved of the idea.

Electoral Enrolment Centre



New Zealand's Electoral Enrolment Centre has encouraged voting-age citizens via advertising to register on the voter rolls by asking for enrollment packs through SMS.

People respond to such overtures. The agency received hundreds of thousands of SMS messages requesting the packs. When it is not election year and the agency is not running ad campaigns, it typically receives 200 to 300 text messages per month.

The service, powered by Datasquirt, is free to citizens.

Voters send texts to a four-digit short code, 3676, powered by Datasquirt. Per the white paper from Messrs. McLeod and Weston-Taylor, the inbound texts go through an initial filtering system.

For example, there is a filter to sort out joke or spam requests such as packs to be sent to God, Mickey Mouse or New Zealand's prime minister.

The agency can and has put blocks on certain mobile numbers where subscribers regularly request enrollment packs for people at addresses that didn't request them.

Another filter separates full, properly formatted addresses from incomplete addresses. The good addresses are then printed out directly on an address label as they are, affixed to an enrollment pack and then mailed.

Other addresses may need an official to edit and filter to ensure correct spellings for street name, suburb and city details.

A key advantage is that the outbound confirmation text response from the agency is automated and doesn't require human involvement.

The enrollment agency is said to favor SMS because it complements other channels for requesting enrolment forms.

Also, the program cost only \$14,000 to set up.

Ministry of Economic Development

Dud or not? That's what the ministry intended would-be buyers to check by texting in the number plate of a used car before they buy it.

The idea behind the TXTB4UBUY program is to use SMS to verify if there are any unpaid fines or other legal issues involving the used car. The text messages are routed to a database to check if there are any alerts on that number plate.

Users can send an SMS message with the vehicle's registration number, VIN or chassis number to the short code 3463, which spells FIND. They can enter any combination of these numbers by separating each with the ? question mark sign — ABC567?1234568765489?987654/ (Rego?VIN?Chassis).

Incoming SMS messages from consumers are sent to the SMS provider and then passed on to the ministry where the search is initiated against the ministry's Personal Property Security Register Web site and a reply sent. This is all automated.

Each search costs 70 cents.

Users will receive an SMS response indicating whether or not a security interest exists for the vehicle being investigated. One of two replies will be sent out:

First: "There appears to be no security registered against <enter value>. To complete the search go to www.ppsr.govt.nz with SMS ID: <SMS ID>"

Second: "There appears to be a security registered against <enter value>. To complete the search go to www.ppsr.govt.nz with SMS ID: <SMS ID>"

Users can also take the SMS ID issued in the response and enter it into the Personal Property Security Register site to confirm the search results and view the entire financing statement of that vehicle.

In 2008, the last year for which data is available, the ministry recorded 2,500 SMS inquiries per month, according to Messrs. McLeod and Weston-Taylor's study. This was the number of citizens visiting the security register site and selecting SMS follow-up search.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENTAL USE OF SMS

SMS not necessarily a standalone channel/medium

Text messaging is a useful tool for reaching specific audiences. So far, government agencies have used it to reach groups such as those without permanent addresses or for teenagers, but it is moving beyond being a technology only for niche audiences.

As an example of this, the Electoral Enrolment Centre's Text To Enroll campaign sought to address the youth market, but found a much broader demographic were using text messaging to register.

However, SMS is still not a communications channel that every single New Zealander can be reached by, and as such, agencies should probably use other channels in addition to text messaging to ensure complete coverage.

Get your records management team involved from Day One

It is probably the message that you want to keep, not how you are sending it out, but either way, any consideration of implementing SMS services should involve your record keepers from the get go.

It is also very important to consider how you are going to be structuring your database so that those SMSes can be kept, and searched.

Privacy issues need to be considered

Some departments use cell phone numbers that they have previously collected from their customers for their SMS service.

The concern about this practice is that personal information held by the government is used only for the purpose for which it was collected or a directly related purpose.

Agencies need to check that the SMS that they want to send is directly related. Otherwise, they need to seek consent from people, or ask them to opt in.

While the Unsolicited Electronic Messages Act 2007 does not apply to government departments, it should be treated as a best practice document.

In essence, the Act says to be clear about who the sender of texts is, and to provide a functional way for the recipients to indicate that they do not wish to receive messages in the future — a way to unsubscribe.

Protecting the authenticity of text messages from the government is vital

SMS is not usually encrypted technology, and intercepted messages may contain personal information.

In order to be an authoritative source of information, agencies need to make sure that their text message systems are secure.

The potential for embarrassment and confusion if SMS services were hacked and inauthentic messages were sent is quite considerable — consider the impact if malicious texts were sent out claiming to be from Immigration New Zealand saying work permits were cancelled, for example. For more information, see <http://www.smsspooing.com/>

SMS is a two-way communications channel

SMS is used effectively as a one-way outbound channel, or as a channel that sends automated replies to inbound messages.

However, agencies need to realize that in implementing a SMS service, they are opening up a two-way channel, irrespective of their intentions.

Dealing with inbound messages individually is a time-consuming task, and many agencies may not have the personnel to meet demand.

If an agency does not want reply to individual inbound messages, there needs to be a clear strategy for dealing with these unsolicited texts (these could be queries, comments, feedback, abuse), and these customers should be steered into using a different communication channel.

It is important that text messages that are received are acknowledged in some form.

Automatic filters may help to sort inbound messages into appropriate response categories.

SMS may be superseded by another technology in the future

Mobile internet is becoming more popular in New Zealand. If agencies are committed to developing ways that the public can interact via text message, they should also consider how customers may want to access their services in the future.

SMS services are sometimes delayed

It is not unheard of for telecommunications companies to become overloaded, and therefore time-critical messages should have a back-up system in place.

SMS can be helpful for those who are hearing-impaired

Many hearing-impaired people find text-messaging to be an ideal form of communication, as no audible conversation is needed.

However, those who are visually impaired are less likely to use text-messaging. As with other factors, multiple channels of message delivery therefore need to be considered.

Paid services delivered via SMS can be charged to the customer easily

Like 0900 telephone numbers before them [in New Zealand], SMS offers the opportunity for “pay to text” services, that allow charges to be put onto a customer’s phone bill instantly.

The Ministry of Economic Development use this feature for their \$1 (70 U.S. cents) charge to use TXTB4UBUY, and there is the potential for other agencies to develop similar services.

Consider customer’s preferences on how to contacted

Ideally before any agency starts text-messaging their customers, they would have asked for explicit permission beforehand. In asking for that permission, agencies should also offer alternative forms of contact — email, telephone, postal service, and so forth.

How will a customer’s preferred form of contact be noted?

Have a plan for a massive response and no response

Agencies need to be realistic about their audience when they start offering an SMS service.

They may be inundated with responses, or they may get fewer responses than expected.

Either way, it is important to be prepared with a backup plan for extra support, or extra promotion of the service.

How will agencies define success?

Before undertaking any SMS project, agencies need to consider what success will look like.

For the Electoral Enrolment Centre, success took the shape of the number of young people who joined the electoral role.

For ImmigrationNZ, it was a reduction in the workload of its call center. The measures of success will vary depending on whether SMS is being used to deliver information or a service.

The SMS scheme may need to be promoted

If an agency’s measures of success include a large uptake of the SMS service, it may need to be promoted, either through advertising such as the Electoral Enrolment Centre’s campaign to get people to enrol to vote via SMS, or through other forms of contact with the agency.

It is important to consider the costs of promotion when preparing a budget for the promotion.

SMS is exactly that — a short message

SMS is a good vehicle for short straightforward messages. Agencies may wish to use another communication channel for more complicated, long or disputed messages.

The use of SMS by a government agency may have an impact beyond the team it emerges from

Agency teams much consider the impact that an SMS scheme will have on the agency as a whole. Are there other branches that will need access to the scheme? Is this going to take traffic away from another department?

Reproduced from “Introduction to SMS Use In Government,” a white paper authored by Joanna McLeod and Lucy Weston-Taylor for New Zealand’s State Services Commission.

BEST-PRACTICE TIPS ORANGE COUNTY (CA)

Operating a Successful SMS Program

Short codes showcase the power of mobile communications by highlighting the versatility of mobile as more than a voice portal. They present an unlimited array of contact possibilities all focused on increasing interaction with mobile consumers.

Also, short codes help government agencies establish a two-way conversation with the people that matter most — citizens.

There are some critical points to keep in mind when creating and implementing an effective SMS program.

The SMS program is expected to reduce the nearly 2,000 bus status and route inquiries received daily, reducing total call-center volume by as much as 25 percent.

Get Subscribers/Promotion

- Mobile interaction does not stand alone. Rather it leverages other forms of communication including print, radio, television, online and out-of-home advertising
- All advertising and promotional material must clearly indicate if the service is a subscription
- Subscription terms and billing intervals must be specified or disclosed to the citizen
- Clearly communicate all material terms and conditions of the program
- Service pricing information is clearly and conspicuously indicated
- All advertising, promotional material, and service Help message clearly display the opt-out information
- The service is not promoted as “free” when premium fees are associated with the service that the subscriber will pay with a reasonable level of participation in the program

Get Permission

- It is vital to respect a mobile subscriber’s right to privacy. Always gain permission from the people you plan to engage by employing an opt-in procedure
- Gaining permission saves money. Each message sent costs money. Ensuring the citizen wants to receive messages avoids any waste of your marketing budget
- Sending unsolicited messages creates a negative impression and erodes agency brand recognition, prompting subscribers to avoid the service and file complaints
- Avoid purchasing lists of numbers. Always have citizens opt-in and subscribe to receive content. For applications that require payment, create a double opt-in process for subscribers that ensure willing participation

Get Creative

- Short codes enable a host of possible applications, limited only by the ability to design and build the mechanisms to support the programs. There are, however, three broad categories of campaigns: 1) Promotional, 2) Informational, and 3) Marketing
- Review business goals and objectives. It is likely that more than one type of campaign will be applicable



HOW TO LEASE A SHORT CODE

There are three easy steps to obtain a short code.

First, from the Common Short Code Administration Web site at <http://www.usshortcodes.com>, find the short code that the government agency seeks. If a specific code is not necessary, the system will assign a random code upon request.

Next, apply for the code by submitting necessary registration data and wait for approval.

Once approved and paid for, the short code will be assigned to the government agency for use. The government agency can renew the short code if it wishes to continue using it.

Find

Use the USShortcodes.com search engine to determine if the desired code is available.

Apply

Fill out the online application and submit for review of completeness and accuracy.

Apply for a random short code or select a specific code within the range of available five-digit (20000 to 99999) or six-digit (222222-899999) codes.

The final approval decision is emailed to the applicant and the payment processed once the applicant is accepted.

Receive

Once payment is received for an accepted short code, the Common Short Code Administration assigns the number to the applicant for the period of time that the government agency has requested.

Wireless service providers are notified of the assignment, and no one else can lease that short code for the duration of the government agency's contract.

Pricing Information

Registering and leasing a short code costs \$1,000 per month for each selected (vanity) short code and \$500 per month for each random short code.

These fees are non-refundable regardless of whether any wireless carrier agrees to activate the government agency's short code.

The registry must receive payment in full for the duration of the registration at the time the application is approved.

The Common Short Code Administration offers registration terms of three months, six months and one year. Because fees are due upfront, if the applicant has registered a selected short code for three months the cost is \$3000. The random short code for three months is \$1500.

For more information on how you can integrate Common Short Codes into your marketing and advertising visit us at www.usshortcodes.com or email us at sales@usshortcodes.com.

ABOUT

About Neustar, Inc.: Neustar (NYSE: NSR) solves complex communications challenges by providing market-leading and innovative solutions and directory services that enable trusted communication across networks, applications, and enterprises around the world. Visit Neustar online at www.neustar.biz. Neustar manages and operates the CSC Registry on behalf of CTIA—The Wireless Association® and participating wireless service providers. Visit the CSCA at www.usshortcodes.com.

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