

MOBILE

SMS' biggest achievement is proving that mobile marketing works

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By CHANTAL TODE

Since the first SMS message was sent 20 years ago, texting has become nearly ubiquitous and is embraced by brands of all shapes and sizes. However, the next two decades may not be as rosy as texting is challenged by sexier smartphone-enabled marketing and the rise of free messaging apps.

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It took several years for SMS to reach critical mass following the delivery of the first message on Dec. 3, 1992, but by 2002, more than 250 million SMS messages were sent around the world, according to Informa Telecoms & Media. While SMS volume has continued to grow – Informa predicts 6.7 trillion messages will be sent in 2012 – the channel struggles to gain acceptance by marketers at the same time that it is facing other pressures.

“SMS is in a fight for its life in some markets as it finds its role as a mobile communications service is usurped by free messaging services, such as WhatsApp, iMessage, Viber, KakaoTalk and Facebook Messenger,” said Pamela Clark-Dickson, senior analyst for mobile content and applications at [Informa Telecoms & Media](#), Westborough, MA.

“Overall, the future remains bright for SMS, if only because it will be some years before

free messaging applications can achieve the same level of penetration as SMS,” she said. “The penetration of smartphones and mobile broadband represent barriers to entry for consumers, as does the lack of interoperability between the OTT offerings.”

Here, several industry representatives weigh in on the impact that SMS has had on mobile marketing in its first 20 years and what the future holds for the channel.

What has been SMS’ biggest impact on marketing in the past 20 years?

Jeff Hasen, chief marketing officer of [Hipcricket](#), Kirkland, WA

Often maligned, I’ll argue that mobile marketing has advanced as far and fast as it has precisely because of text messaging. Sure, it’s unsexy and hardly a creative tactic in and of itself, but SMS provides reach to nearly 100 percent of phones and to the 75 percent who text on a regular basis.

SMS has most effectively made traditional media interactive, moving product, driving trial and building monetizable databases for Macy’s, Arby’s and many others. Simply, text messaging has proven that mobile works for brands.

Tim Miller, president, [Sumotext Corp.](#), Little Rock, AR

T-Mobile published the first carrier playbook in 2007 that finally described what we could and couldn’t do with SMS over their network. Until that time, everyone was guessing and every connection aggregator had a different opinion on what you could and couldn’t submit to carriers to get your short code, provisioned, tested and certified.

The T-Mobile playbook was the first document that cleared the air and gave everyone confidence to invest in, design and build compliant products for marketers.

James Citron, cofounder/CEO of [Mogreet](#), Venice, CA

SMS and its multimedia counterpart, MMS have opened the door for brands, retailers, media outlets and other organizations to reach and build brand fans in a method that they’re all accustomed to using on a daily basis, text messaging. With the permission-based, opt-in nature of SMS/MMS marketing campaigns, marketers grow a captive audience waiting and willing to receive messages in the inbox just as if they would receive a text message from a friend.

SMS and MMS has enabled brands to be integrated into the most personal form of a marketing communication that you can accomplish today – text messaging. SMS and MMS text message marketing still prevails today as the most ubiquitous mobile marketing channel that marketers can use knowing that their target audience has full access and requires little to no learning curve to adopt.

Looking forward, what will be the biggest change to SMS that will impact marketers?

Jeff Hasen, chief marketing officer of [Hipcricket](#), Kirkland, WA

Moving forward, the naysayers will continue to predict the demise of SMS. I’m not in that camp. But challenges include possible pricing changes from the carriers, closed

messaging programs like Apple's iMessage, and some marketers' inability to be pragmatic.

Tim Miller, president, Sumotext Corp., Little Rock, AR

The beauty of SMS is that it will never change. It remains the only other ubiquitous, carrier-neutral, operating-system-neutral, device-neutral, telecommunication standard. I do think we will begin to see and hear much more about MMS as brands leverage pictures, audio and video into text messages that are much longer than 160 characters. And I don't think enough observers yet realize the ability for MMS to bypass the walled app stores to get content into our mobile wallets.

James Citron, cofounder/CEO of Mogreet, Venice, CA

The biggest change in SMS in 2013 is going to be the shift from short form text-only messaging to multimedia rich MMS messaging. With the increase in smartphone adoption and as the advancements of phone camera equipment grows, consumers are more and more comfortable with creating and sharing multimedia content. As brands and consumer engagement with mobile video dramatically increases, MMS is emerging as the perfect medium for extending digital storytelling and for building deeper relationships between the brand, their products or services and their consumer.

Final Take

Chantal Tode is associate editor on Mobile Marketer, New York

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