

# Generation "Text"

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By Inez Blackburn - Author of "Pride Passion Profit - 7 Steps to Category Development"

**Did you know** that over 80 percent of all Americans carry mobile phones and there are more mobile-only households than landline-only households? The volume of text messages doubles each year with numbers in the United States exceeding 1 billion text messages per day. I learned the hard way that the best way to get in touch with anyone between the ages of 10-21 is to text them. A lesson that I learned the hard way after leaving numerous voice-mail messages for my 19 year old daughter with absolutely no response. Is she Ok I thought, busy studying, the possibilities were endless until I sought the guidance of my 13 year old son. Did you text her he asked? The best way to get in touch with Tasha is to text and I text her at least 5 times a day. What a great idea I thought so with cell phone in hand I texted her and within 30 seconds received a response.

While there is a lot of buzz around text messaging and the opportunity of mobile marketing, very few companies have taken the step toward full integration with their marketing plans. There is demonstrated interest in this medium but how do you stand out in an arena of noise. How do you shield yourself from being affected by a negative text experience initiated by aggressive marketers vying for a share of heart and wallet?

Do you realize that it is virtually impossible to use a cell, the internet, listen to the radio or watch T.V. without experiencing some sort of brand interaction or messaging? Marketing and branding are everywhere and have become an accepted way of life but how much is too much and what happens to your marketing initiative when your target consumer opts out.

In the connected world that we live in consumers are more accessible now than at any other time in history: We have increased the channels which have increased the noise but to what effect and how much is too much? Drowning your target audience in marketing messages has emerged as the new reality in a world where we can communicate to the masses at the touch of a button.

In my most recent article in this journal, "Wireless Marketing – Opportunities and Implications" I discussed the implications and opportunities of mobile marketing. Since the article was published I've become the victim of

text messaging gone wild and I received a bill from my cell phone provider that included a charge of almost \$60 for premium text messages.

I received in excess of seven messages a day from a dating service that provided tips on how to present yourself in a bar and look interested when you are not. The messages highlighted ad nauseam how to twirl your hair to look vulnerable in social settings and how to stimulate conversation in awkward moments and to quote Miranda from Sex and the City when he is just not that into you. When I first received the messages I just ignored them thinking that it was an advertising campaign gone wild as the messages had no relevance to me despite being humorous. I also found it interesting that I would receive such text messages on the verge of my 25th wedding anniversary. Was someone trying to tell me something? As the days went by, the number of messages increased and I continued to take them in stride. But, I thought, who was behind these text messages and why?

The text messages continued their assault on my BlackBerry and now included tips on how to dress without looking too sexy which is advice I really need as I will be turning 48 later this year. I began to think that one of my friends signed me up for this service as a joke, because it was too ridiculous to take seriously.

My text messaging oblivion came to a crashing halt when I received my cell bill with an additional charge of \$60 for premium text messages. As soon as I saw the bill I contacted my cell phone provider to enquire why I had been charged for text messages that I didn't need or want. I explained that I thought it was a joke and never in my wildest dreams expected to be charged. The customer service rep explained that these are premium text messages generated by a computer with no human intervention - as such are defined as "premium text messages". Premium text messages she explained are a subscription text service that you have to sign up for by giving your cell number. I was intrigued by her response and asked why messages that are automated and computer driven are more expensive than a voice mail with real human beings. The customer service rep said all messages that are subscription based and generated by a computer carry a charge of \$1.00 - \$1.50 per message.

I then asked if there was any upper limit on the number of text messages that I can receive. She said no, it is up to the subscription service. I then asked, "Do you mean to tell me that this text messaging dating advice service can send me 50 messages a day and charge me \$50 dollars a day for the privilege of receiving messages that I don't need or want?" She thought for a minute and then said yes because, after all, they are premium given that fact that no humans are involved. I then explained that it was a mistake as I did not subscribe to this service and I would like to stop the text messages that I don't want. To which she replied, "You will have to contact the provider to stop the service." I then hung up, took my cell phone in hand, and tried to respond to the text messages.

Interestingly, the source number was only four or five digits, which apparently indicate that it is a computer driven response. I had over 30 text messages from at least six different numbers to respond to, so I began texting "Please stop these text messages" as a reply to the first 15 messages and then began texting "Please do not text me anymore" to the next 15. The response I got from the source number was "you are not subscribed to this service," which was interesting as I continued to receive text messages while I was texting the service to stop.

I was getting absolutely nowhere, so I decided to call back my cell phone provider to ask for help in stopping the service. This time I received a different customer service rep who told me that someone must have signed up for the service and accidentally typed in my cell number, which didn't make me feel much better as there should be more security in place. I thanked her for the insight and asked "how do I stop it." She paused for a moment and said she saw something on TV, some kind of advertisement which said that if you want to stop a service like this you should just text the word "stop". So much for manners when communicating with a computer. I then proceeded to text the word stop to every text I received and received a response once again "you are not subscribed to this service." I then turned into a text warrior and continued to text the word stop to every response until I received the message that the service had been stopped. It took on average five text messages of the word "stop" to every number before the texting ended. I then demanded that the charges get reversed. When you do the math, this was a total of more than 100 text messages.

I argued that my cell phone provider is invoicing their customers on behalf of these text computers gone wild and I am confident that they are taking a commission. I made my case by stating that if you don't charge me then you can't pay them and the text service would stop to which she replied "Mam, this is a premium text service and there is a premium charge for subscribers" The con-

versation began to sound like the Dr. Seuss book Green Eggs and Ham as I was getting the same answer regardless of the question.

The good news is that I was successful in reversing the charges, but I fear for anyone with kids who inadvertently sign up for horoscopes or weather updates as the cost could be prohibitive. Do you realize the potential for abuse when an unsuspecting cell phone user innocently replies to an email asking if you want your horoscope or a well meaning friend signs you up for sports scores or updates?

When I wrote the article on mobile messaging I never thought that I would experience this within days of the publication, nor did I expect to find such aloofness with my cell phone provider. I do believe that there is a consequence of being stupid and that cell phone providers should protect the rights of their customers before they pursue incremental revenues at the expense of those customers.

I also feel somewhat jaded by this experience and will proceed with extreme caution when I receive an unsolicited text message. I know that we live in a wired world and are in the midst of generation "text," with texting replacing talking and I have been dragged kicking and screaming into the text revolution. I am extremely concerned about where it will lead as mobile marketing takes center stage.

To help you get started and better understand the mobile marketing opportunity I have included Mobile Marketing - The rules of victory for you reference.

## Mobile Marketing – The Rules of victory

With this in mind, here are five ways marketers can supercharge their mobile marketing, turning choosy consumers into loyal customers.

### 1. **Stop swimming upstream and embrace the new medium**

Mobile devices are ubiquitous and are always on and open for messaging we have never experienced an electronic device that is never turned off and like that old tagline, consumers "never leave home without it."

Mobile functionality is increasing at a geometric pace with capabilities that go beyond traditional communication and we only need to look at the emergence of new applications to see where the market is going

While we cannot disregard the potential of the mobile market we must dedicate ourselves to meaningful and relevant messages and customer interactions.

## 2. **Look for Synergy and Fit with current Marketing Initiatives**

Text messaging can be effective tool in marketing when you demonstrate proficiency in using the technology and the medium at an early stage. Text messaging when deployed effectively can be a competitive advantage and effective mode of communication at all stages of the customer lifecycle. You can effectively use mobile messaging to compliment marketing, customer service, and key business processes such as accounting and collections. To be effective you must at an early stage demonstrate proficiency in text-messaging very early in the relationship or you may invoke a response from your customer that could block future communications. Embrace this technology in stages by targeting key processes and sub processes in customer relations by investigating opportunities in customer awareness, customer care and acquisition with the eventual goal of retention.

## 3. **Leverage touch points cautiously rather than intrusively, and less is more**

While mobile marketing represents an opportunity to interact directly with consumers across multiple touch points commit yourself to avoiding unwelcome intrusions.

The idea of mass marketing and using a push model to target entire customer databases with some form of a generic text message could result in a negative response. Text messaging does not behave like a standard TV commercial or Billboard as the consumer must do the work to avoid it and could incur unwanted costs. Invite consumers in on their own terms with a softer approach and message that is meaningful. Asking if the consumer would like access to an electronic barcode for a special promotion will often get a better response than an uninvited message. Manners are universally accepted and there has never been a stronger business case for politeness.

Mobile marketing should always be integrated with current marketing initiatives and not a stand alone initiative. The messaging should be a natural evolution and extension of current brand strategies, designed to strengthen brand positioning and identity and driving customer intimacy.

## 4. **Do not create lasting memories – keep it simple and learn to purge**

Most text messages are for an extended period of time on the mobile device consuming much needed space and clogging your inbox. Be sure when designing a text message to ensure that the message contains detailed information that is easily retained and forwarded. Do not follow the experience of companies who opted for detailed voice messages that are cumbersome and extremely time consuming.

Consider, for example, the benefits of a text message I received from a friend a few months ago regarding a 50th

birthday party “You are invited to Richard’s 50th surprise birthday party on January 10th our home. Please arrive by 7 PM” I was able to save all the details add the information to my calendar and forward the message to my husband.

## 5. **Use mobile communications to strengthen customer relationships**

It is extremely rare to see a text message stand alone and survive when it relates to mobile marketing. Text messaging is most often used to compliment other communications with the notable exception of situations where a text-messaging program is designed to generate revenue or reduce costs. Wherever possible use text messaging to compliment other marketing communications.

An excellent example an integrated channels can be found when you dial 411 for directory assistance. I really like the fact that the service will not only dial the number but send one number you requested, you have the option of receiving the information as a text message. I see this form of messaging is a great opportunity as allows you to record detailed information conveniently without the extra activity of writing it down.

***In conclusion:*** This mobile medium, specifically text messaging can help your marketing efforts with a more direct approach in developing relationships with your customers through increased awareness and many companies have already benefited from leveraging the numerous mobile channels.

**Further the rapid adoption of smart phones and growing mobile market will place increased pressure on companies to embrace this new medium. My only advice is to approach this opportunity by viewing text messaging as an integrated piece of your marketing communications strategy and not a stand alone initiative.**

*“Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people adapt the world to themselves. Leaders adapt themselves and the world to each other. Interestingly, unreasonable people are often tasked with the responsibility of change!” - George Bernard Shaw*

**Inez Blackburn** is a globally recognized speaker, industry leader, innovator and pioneer in launching global brands. She has worked with many Fortune 500 companies and led numerous executives through her “Positioned for Profit” seminars and “Marketing to the Max” workshops. She is currently the President of Market Techniques & Innovations Inc., and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Toronto and SP Jain University. Inez is co-author of “Pride Passion Profit - 7 Steps to Category Development”. The book is well positioned to help companies poised for growth to capitalize on global trends through customer intimacy.