

Panel 3 Q & A: Using Mobile Devices to Inspire Action – Video Transcript

(Highlights from Session 3 Q&A at the “Taming the Media Monster” Conference, June 26, 2009.)

Bill Albert (moderator): ... How do you respond to those of us who are, tend to be Eores, you know, from...from, you know uh, that...that say, you know, “I don’t get this stuff and even if I get it, I can’t afford it. And even if I get it and I afford it, I don’t have time to do it.” How do you respond to those of us who might offer that as sort of a defense about why we’re shy about doing mobile uh, technology or using that in the work that we do?

Becky Griesse: Uh, I would say that we really need to meet uh, our clients, our customers, our youth where they’re at and if text messaging is where they’re at, then that’s where we need to be. Uh, and you don’t have to be very tech savvy. You don’t, you know, it doesn’t...it doesn’t have to cost a lot of money. You can do it on a budget. Uh, if you have a cell phone uh, like I do, then you can answer text messages. Uh, of course, you can get overwhelmed and there’s other things to think about, but we really have to meet our...our youth where they’re at and that’s where.

Kevin Bertram: Yeah. I mean I just think about the way the Internet was a good twelve, fifteen years ago. People are like, “Oh, that’s complicated.” And then, you know, some people got left behind and, you know, some organizations moved ahead really aggressively. And the ones that moved ahead and embraced it aggressively because that’s where their constituents were uh, have flourished. And so I think that, you know,

it's not expensive. I...I actually am shocked that she does everything off her personal cell. Like that's...that's like...like that's a pain uh, but uh, but there are really low-cost ways to solve those so you can do it from a laptop and you're just ignoring a huge part of the population and especially, you know, there's still somewhat of a digital divide where while the "haves" might have computers. And so if you're doing a lot of great stuff online that's great for the people who are online, but there's a lot of people, especially over represented minority communities where the mobile phone is the primary device where they don't have broadband access at home; rarely have access to computers. And so you really do a disservice to that part of the community if you overlook their primary means of communication.

Carmel Pryor: Yes. I agree with everything. Uh, yeah, you...you...you would definitely be remiss to not have some type of social media component to whatever type of program you're doing, but especially when it comes to behavior change. It's just another way to kind of like what Becky said, meet people where they are and if that's where they are, then, hey, you gotta do it. Uh, definitely for us when we were doing a lot of the uh, focus groups with our young people, they said cell phones. That's it. You have to reach people on cell phones and nobody else in DC is doing it with health. And so they're like if you can break into that and have us pay attention through our cell phones, that's huge. If you can make the web site compatible with our cell phone so we can actually see everything and it's not all, you know, like jargoned up uh, then that would be great 'cause that's what we work with. It's, you know, when you talk to people who work in the field as well like in Africa especially with their awesome mobile networking, that's where it is. It's all about the cell phone. Everybody has a cell phone, everywhere in the world. It

doesn't matter, you know, if you're, you know, the richest person on the block or, you know, you might live in a shanty town in, you know, South Africa like, you have cell phone. Uh, and so it's...it's definitely, we're in the beginning stages of uh, how we actually engage with people 'cause right now I know the RealTalkDC Campaign it's more of an opt-in situation and it's automated and so there isn't really like a, an opportunity for it to feel very personal. Uh, that's still definitely missing uh, with digital. Uh, but, you know, it's...it's just one way to do it so why not try it.

Bill Albert: ...how do you sort of keep people engaged without sort of getting them to tune out, you know? I often sign up for things that seem interesting and after about two weeks of getting constant messages, I now tune them out. I either...

Kevin Bertram: You sign up for them on e-mail not on text messages, correct?

Bill Albert: Exactly.

Kevin: Yeah. It hap, so this is something we definitely learned in the Obama campaign and we've seen it for other clients as well, is that people get e-mail fatigue. And I don't know if any of you donated to the Obama campaign—thank you, 'cause they paid their bills on time. Uh, you got overwhelmed. You got swamped with e-mails and I'm not going to, you know, that was the campaign's decision. I'm not criticizing them in any way, but...but obviously people got fatigued about it. And in the text messaging part we specifically did not do that. The only time that people were bombarded was on either your primary election day or then in the general election day and other than that we tried to limit it. We did a lot of stuff that was geo-targeted so if there was going to be an event in your town, then we'd let you know about that, kind of extra. And uh, you know, that

made a lot of sense and that's why, I mean that's why I just love text messaging as opposed to e-mail... in the text messaging space people have got a lot more, a...a lighter touch and so the number of that message volume is much lower. But when it does come they know I'm going to read it and it seems to be much more effective. Uh, so yeah, so I...I, don't take the terrible, terrible lessons of e-mail and apply them to text messaging because, yeah, I mean if someone sent, if I signed up to a program by text messaging and I got ten messages a day, I would just stop. And that would be, and you would do a disservice to your organization. You would harm, you would hurt your goal rather than helping it.

Carmel: ... when we were speaking with young people about what types of messages they did want to receive from us once...once they opted in, they said, "Okay. So all of the, you know, put on a condom or you're gonna die." Or like anything that sounded very preachy or you're young and you don't know what you're talking about, they did not want to get. They're were gonna tune out immediately; opt-out immediately. And so we said, "Well, what if we sent you messages about upcoming events that you could come to, you know, like free food, live DJ. Oh, yeah, by the way, free HIV and STD testing." They're like, "Yeah, that'd be cool." Make sure that you, you know, pump up the free food and DJ part, you know, and so that's what we do. That's, we, our opt-in messages are always about events. Uh, we did consider, you know, sending like a HIV/AIDS or STD like fact, but they enjoyed option three a lot more where it was an interactive game. So for example the very first question that you get is, "True or...true or false, is, does DC have the highest HIV prevalence in the country?" And then if you press "true" then it says, "Oh, yeah. You're correct." ...go on to the next question. If it's "false," then it

says, “Unfortunately this is true. One out of twenty DC residents has HIV.” So uh, they like that interactive component a lot better than just receiving random messages from us.

Bill Albert: Just to add to that uh, we...we found in...in testing for another project that we’re working on that very same thing that, you know, rather than just a reminder or something, attaching it to a weather report or something that’s really engaging and different everyday uh, at least among the target audience that we were working with seemed to be...seemed to be effective.

Audience: I’m very interested in the estimated startup cost. I know you all said that it’s affordable, but I know you have a very different means than you do with the computer generated. I was wondering if you could estimate what startup cost would be. I mean are we talking a couple thousand, tens of thousands? Like what...what are we talking about for startup cost?

Becky Griesse: Well, my costs are very low right now uh, as far as actually running the program I mean beyond my actual time. Uh, it costs, what it costs for me to have like my iPhone, you know, per month...per month activity with unlimited text messages. Uh, and then advertising is the part that’s gonna be the more expensive part and that would be thousands and thousands of dollars uh, depending on what type of uh, (voice fades).

Carmel Pryor: ...in terms of the texting piece uh, again we use a company out of San Francisco called “ISIS,” Internet Sexuality Information Systems, and uh, very, very awesome. I encourage all of you if you’re, whoever’s interested, if your organization is interested in texting, even web site. They manage our web site as well. Uh, look to them, they have awesome rates for nonprofits. The thing is that this program is one

hundred percent funded by the D.C. Department of Health and they pay them directly. So I'm actually uh, not entirely clear on how much they directly pay them for the service. I do know that for the web site and the maintenance thereof, it was upwards of uh, fifteen thousand dollars for uh, the creation and then maintenance. So they actually have a staff person that we talk to that does all the behind html stuff and all that uh, and that's for a year. Uh, in terms of the ad space that we have on the buses with CBS Outdoors who manages all of the bus ads, that is approximately twelve thousand dollars a month uh, and so we're doing three months. It's expensive, but...

Kevin: But yet you also see those all over the place, too.

Audience: About how many buses?

Carmel: We're on over five hundred buses.

Audience: I was just gonna comment on the cost. We run the State of Iowa texting campaign and we've been really creative with uh, using public relations instead of advertising to drive people to participate. So doing uh, like Dan was saying like Facebook advertising; Myspace advertising, where you pay per click, so you're not paying for an actual banner ad. You're just paying every time someone actually clicks on your ad and it's very affordable, very cheap, using teen advocates similar to uh, what you were talking about, that wear T-shirts, that go out in the schools and do it, doing newspaper ads in the school newspapers, which usually is either free or like thirty dollars to do an ad, now, granted, you have to get permission from the schools to do that. Uh, doing banners at state sporting events; doing booths at state sporting events, so you're not creating brand new events, but you're going to events where the teens already are; doing

uh, ads in movie theaters uh, on the screens which again doesn't cost a lot. So I mean there are very creative ways to get your message out there without spending a ton of money uh, on advertising.

Audience: (Inaudible) talk to you a little bit about do you think it's reasonable to use these approaches if you're targeting people who are in their twenties? Are you, are they texting? Would they respond to that?

Kevin: So I can send you reams of numbers, but that'd be sort of boring. The thing to remember is that—I know this is a conference on teens, but I assume a lot of you work in other than just teen, at least some of you, you know, are concerned about general health. Uh, text messaging is similar to the way e-mail was about nineteen ninety-five, nineteen ninety-six where initially it was just people in academic institutions of certain age groups. And it grew wider and wider and wider and then you, at what point, you know, today what grandmother doesn't attach forty-two pictures of her granddaughter to everybody. She can send them to everybody she knows by e-mail. I mean it's just, it's part of what you do now and we're seeing the same uh, adoption curve occurring with text messaging. ... kind of big growth is that people try to text their kids when their kids go off to college because they won't answer phone calls. They won't answer e-mails, but they'll text back and then they say, "Okay. This isn't so hard." And then they text their spouse and then they get, start getting a stock quote to the, what are they, and so uh, that's long, sorry to give so much exposition about it, but it's something that I really feel passionately about it is that it's not only a teenage uh, phenomenon. Uh, even in the uh, forty-five to fifty-four age group uh, people send more text messages than make phone calls and that's at the forty, now I'm not saying someone in that age group is texting the way a sixteen-year old

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girl does. Obviously there's a much higher uh, number of messages going out among younger people, but to assume that older people don't text message is just wrong.

Becky: And just to add on to that uh, I have received text messages from parents and whatnot uh, asking, you know, when should I start talking to my child about sex and that type of thing; so while by far I get more teens that uh, text me, it is something that adults and twenty-somethings use as well.

Kevin: Yeah. Twenty-somethings are solidly in the texting group. I mean I'm talking about old people, like my age so.

Kevin: ...a lot of you may have smart phones, iPhones. They're pretty fantastic, but the thing to remember is eighty-five percent of the population still has what are called, "feature phones," which, they text in the e-mail and they have a little mobile web application. Uh, I keep a feature phone specifically so I don't forget where the bulk of our audience is at, uh, which my staff will make fun of me for. But uh, I think that you're gonna see that phones are going to, even the lowest-end phones are going to have more capabilities; to have more e-mail; to be able to display video, which I'm a little, you know, I mean that's a couple years out. But, you know, the...the phone is just gonna become a more and more and more dynamic device and you're going to be able to do all the things that you can do on a computer on it. The thing that, you know, I don't, I'm not gonna make specific predictions, instead what I'm gonna say is the thing to remember is that you need to make sure you're choosing your media, medium or media intelligently. There are things that the phone is not the best thing for. Even if you can do it on the phone, who cares? Don't do it on the phone if that, it's not right. I mean I think about,

you know, I like sports. I watch a lot of sports. I don't want to watch a sporting event on this. I want to watch it in my home on a big screen TV. If I'm stuck out of the house, I'll watch something on this and, you know, just because you can do something it's bleeding edge, doesn't mean you should. You need to think about the customer experience or the consumer experience and...and make sure it...it makes sense and you're gonna be able to measure and have demonstrable re...results. Don't just say, "Oooh. It's a new technology. We gotta do it." Say, "It's a new technology. Is there a way that it can help us?" And that's sort of, you know, regardless of what those new technologies are.