



The Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe

www.kubatana.net

"An online community for Zimbabwean activists"

How to Run a Mobile Advocacy Campaign

October 2008

For advocacy organizations, mobile phone messaging is used most effectively for facilitating a dialogue with their constituents.



Why SMS?

In a 'mobile advocacy campaign,' your organisation develops a communication strategy that incorporates the sending of text messages to your members' mobile phone numbers. There are many reasons why you might want to do this. Texting gets the attention of your members as it is delivered to a device they carry wherever they go – their mobile phone. It opens up channels for speedy, affordable two-way communications with your members. And in many contexts, more people have access to a mobile phone than they do to email or the Internet. Importantly, they don't have to be at work or go to an Internet café to get your communications.

However, SMS also has some constraints, and it is important to bear these in mind in your work. A text message can contain only 160 characters¹, which limits how much you can say. This makes SMS a great tool for getting people to meetings and events, prompting them to act on an issue you've already informed them about, or directing them to alternate sources of more information about an issue. Remember, mobile numbers can also change owners – if someone sells their line or gives it to a friend, you may have people getting your messages who aren't the same people who originally subscribed.

SMS should be used to supplement an organisation's other communications methods, not replace them altogether.

There are essentially four key components to running a **Mobile Advocacy Campaign**:

- a creative outreach and publicity campaign to attract subscribers
- selecting the most appropriate technology and/or SMS gateway
- securing the budget and resources to implement the mobile advocacy campaign
- integrating SMS within your communications strategy

¹ Some phones can handle more than this, but that means sending more than one text message – so your costs go up. Also, some people's phones (particularly in developing countries or in lower income communities), can only get 160 characters at a time – so if your message is longer than that, it will get broken up or truncated.

You can read some interesting case studies of how organisations have used mobile phones and SMS in innovative ways for their campaigns in this recent report: Wireless Technology for Social Change: Trends in NGO Mobile Use available at <http://mobileactive.org/wireless-technology-social-change-trends-ngo-mobile-use>.

A. The First Step: subscriber database, outreach/publicity campaign

If your organisation wants to use SMS to communicate with your constituency then you need a database of cell phone numbers.

It is important to get “buy-in” from the people to whom you wish to send text messages. Otherwise it is likely that you will be accused of sending out “spam” (unsolicited messages) and you will irritate your constituency rather than encouraging their support. In a politically sensitive environment, your organisation could be reported for invasion of privacy and thus run the risk of incurring investigation, fining or closure by the telecommunications authorities or the state.

Ensuring that you sensibly and creatively collect and organise your database of cell phone numbers is an integral factor in the success of your SMS outreach and communication campaigns.

Remember that you should never share or sell subscribers’ mobile numbers to third parties without the subscribers’ permission.

Make sure to:

- take backup copies of your updated SMS lists
- encrypt or securely store SMS lists particularly if you are communicating with stigmatised or persecuted individuals or if you are operating in a politically sensitive environment

Here are some tips:

1) In all your *organisational emails* encourage recipients to sign up for your SMS campaigns. Place this call for participation as a footer in your emails.

2) If your organisation has a *web site* make sure that you include the call for participation in your SMS campaigns on your home page.

3) At *public meetings, workshops and conferences* make sure that you collect contact details from all the attendees. Back at the office send them either an SMS or an email asking them if they would like to subscribe to your SMS campaigns.

4) If your organisation produces media products like *calendars, leaflets or magazines* make sure to include your call for participation in your SMS campaigns in these products.

5) Engage a creative resource to design *newspaper or magazine advertisements* for your organisation so that you reach thousands of members of the general public who are your most important constituency. Remember: if your adverts are boring then you won’t excite people enough to sign up. Make sure to come up with creative advertisements which compel people to subscribe. Be strategic about which publications you put these in, so that you reach out to thousands of potential subscribers. And focus your advert so that you reach that publication’s target audience.

6) *Internet banner advertisements* on popular local websites are a useful tactic.

7) Consider placing *billboards* in strategic places telling the public about your SMS campaigns and encouraging them to subscribe.

8) Use *broadcast media* to inform the public about your SMS campaigns.

9) Engage some volunteers like *students* on *campuses* around the country to spread the word amongst their friends.

10) Approach other individuals and organisations in your field and your constituency directly. Invite them to join your subscriber list, and ask them to spread the word through their networks.

Get organised!

The more information you collect from your subscribers, the more you’ll be able to target your campaign to specific sectors of your constituency. For example, if you collect information like the subscribers’ gender or where they live, you’d then be able to target SMS’s to women, or to those living in a certain city, and so forth. Organising your information in a database like Microsoft Access will make it easy to select just the subscribers you want to target each time you send a message.

Remember: you don't have to use all of these tactics but the more you can use the more diverse your subscriber list will be.

Note!

- Make sure that you keep good records which track when people sign up so that if you are accused of spamming you can refer back to your records.
- Make sure that you engage a trusted member of staff to handle your SMS campaign communications. Databases of mobile phone numbers can be traded – sold to businesses which want to sell advertising to mobile phone users. Disgruntled or retrenched employees can also abuse their access to mobile phone databases by sending out negative information about your organisation to your subscriber list. We recommend that the member of staff assigned to SMS campaign communications signs a contract which specifically forbids the abuse of the system and the sharing of the database with other organisations and companies.



Exercise 1: Get started!

How many SMS subscribers does your organisation currently have? _____

How many would you like to have in six months from now? _____ In one year? _____

How will you get these members?

- Public meetings and events you can attend to recruit at: _____

- In-house publications you can use to let people know about your SMS subscriber list:

- Publications and media you can advertise in: _____

- Other advertising ideas: _____

Find out how much these different options will cost. Use this information to get a sense of the types of advertising you want to do, and the quantity and frequency, given your organisation's budget.

Are you concerned that the authorities might target the recipients of your text messages? _____

If Yes, how will you limit unauthorised access your SMS list? : _____

B. How Do You Do IT? Selecting appropriate technology, SMS gateways

OK. So now that you've got some back ground information, how do you put it into action?

As mentioned previously SMS campaigns work best if you provide an interactive, two way service. People like to respond, and they like to have their feedback recognised and recorded. Our recommendation is that you select an option which encourages dialogue.

Here are some options for you to consider:

Option A – Sending *OUT* only – using a commercial bulk SMS gateway

eg Clickatell².

- Sign up online by opening an account. There are 2 useful options³:
 - Communicator account
 - Messenger account
- Transfer money to Clickatell in preparation for sending out messages (the amount you credit will be dependent on how many messages you want to send). When you buy credits in bulk, the unit cost is discounted.
- Set up the name or phone number you want for your sender ID.
- Upload the database of mobile phone numbers that you've compiled.

² To use Clickatell you'll need Internet access and a credit card or some other way to deposit your payment into one of Clickatell's bank accounts. See www.clickatell.com

³ In the Communicator account, mobile numbers are held online with Clickatell. You can manage your address book and send messages to these mobile numbers from any computer as long as you can login to your account via the internet. Clickatell protects the privacy of your subscriber lists. But, if you are dealing with a very sensitive subscriber list, and do not want this list hosted online, or if you have very limited Internet connectivity and want to be able to manage your subscriber list offline, you may want to download the Messenger application and manage your subscriber lists from your own computer. This training manual assumes the Communicator account scenario.

- Use Clickatell's online facility to send an SMS "blast" to all your subscribers. Differentiate between Communicator & Messenger accounts here?
- You can use Clickatell's reporting services to monitor the "land" rate of your text messages, and you can use their web interface to update and manage your subscriber list.

*Note – unless you're based in South Africa, your organisation will need access to foreign currency to use Clickatell.

Option B – Sending *OUT* – using local funds

If your subscriber list is not large (less than 500 numbers) then we recommend using FrontlineSMS⁴.

To use FrontlineSMS, you don't need access to the internet. You do need a computer on which you can run FrontlineSMS, and a GSM modem or a mobile phone handset that works with FrontlineSMS. FrontlineSMS is a small application that doesn't use up too much memory – so you can keep it running in the background whilst you do other things on the computer if you like.

You'll also want a SIM card just for your SMS campaign. Ideally, a contract line is the best idea - otherwise you will need to top up the pre-paid line regularly and keep your airtime window open.

Then you'd use the Frontline software interface to:

- Load your subscribers' numbers
- Send your text messages
- And manage your subscriber list

Option C – Sending *OUT* and *RECEIVING*

You can also use FrontlineSMS to be able to receive text messages from your subscribers as well as just sending them out. This opens up the genuine two-way communication options that SMS provides.

You would load your numbers and send out your messages in the same way as in Option B above, but you would also use another component of FrontlineSMS to receive subscribers' messages directly onto your computer as a text file. If you have a lot of SMS subscribers, you might find it more efficient to use Clickatell to send out the text message – but you can still receive the replies locally⁵.

A staff member could then process this raw data, extracting the sender's number and message, enabling your organisation to track communications across a campaign.

Security concerns and SMS

Depending on where you are conducting your SMS campaign, the types of issues you address, and your target audience and subscriber base, you may need to be aware of some security concerns surrounding SMS.

If you are working on a campaign that has security risks, your organisation probably already has a variety of security measures in place. Make sure your SMS policies fit into these measures, and that you discuss the risks associated with SMS campaigning, and how you'll address them as an organisation, before you get started.

Here are some security tips to think about:

- Encrypt your subscriber list and message logs, or keep all SMS campaign related material on an encrypted PGP disc.
- If you're using Clickatell, use a Messenger account so that your subscriber list is not hosted online.
- Get someone in South Africa to deposit money directly into the Clickatell account at a bank – rather than using a credit card or bank transfer which can be traced.
- If you're using a local number to send or receive messages, make sure it's a pre-paid line that doesn't have any user ID associated with it. Keep your SIM card out of the phone when you're not using it, and try and send messages from different locations each time, so that it is harder to triangulate your position.

Also look at the Security section of Mobiles in-a-box – www.tacticaltech.org/mobileadvocacy

⁴ <http://frontlinesms.kiwanja.net/>

⁵ Note that, for a fee, Clickatell also enables user to set up two-way SMS Messaging for certain countries. You can find out more at http://www.clickatell.com/products/two_way.php

C. Budget and resources

What is this going to cost?

Budget A - using an online SMS gateway such as Clickatell

Suppose you wanted to send an alert to your 1500 person subscriber list, once a week, for one month.

Clickatell works in units - depending on what carrier they use on a given day, text messages cost between .8 and 2 units to send. You can find out exactly how much it costs to send to a given network on the Clickatell website.

So, to be on the safe side, let's say it will take 1.5 units per message. Credits with Clickatell cost about USD .06 each (less if you buy in bulk).

So that's 4 days of messages x 1500 people per message x 1.5 units / message x USD .06 / credit
 $= 4 * 1500 * 1.5 * .06 = \text{USD } 540.$

These costs will go up or down depending on the frequency with which you send out your text messages, and how many people are in your subscriber list. This is one more reason to make sure that you are sending your messages to people who *want* to be on your list, rather than wasting organisational funds spamming people.

Budget B - using FrontlineSMS

If you use FrontlineSMS, your costs can come down (if your local text messaging costs are less than Clickatell's), but the administrative time spend sending out the messages increases. Sending messages using Frontline is a much slower process than using a web-based gateway, and is only recommended for lists of less than 500 subscribers.

Frontline also requires an investment in the SIM card and GSM modem or compatible handset. This will probably cost between USD100-300, unless you already have a handset that works with FrontlineSMS.

Remember that it is advisable to dedicate a SIM card and device to your SMS campaign for its duration.

GSM modems we've tested with FrontlineSMS include:

- Falcom Samba 75 modem - <http://www.falcom.de/products/mobile-data/samba75/>
- Wavecom GSM modem (abt USD 300) - http://www.gprsmodems.co.uk/acatalog/Online_Catalogue_Wavecom_GSM_GPRS_Mode_ms_100.html

Or have a look on the FrontlineSMS site for a list of mobile phone handsets that have been tested with FrontlineSMS - <http://www.frontlinesms.com/download/requirements.php>

You will also need to factor in costs for advertising or other methods to recruit new subscribers to your campaign, as well as the costs of producing, posting, or distributing any materials which you offer to share with your SMS subscribers.

D. Running the campaign

Right. So now we're all set up. How do we get started?

How to compose a message

- Message space is very short so it is suited for very straightforward notifications, announcements, appeals or alerts. It is not the right medium to make constituents aware of complicated issues. But you can use SMS to raise an issue and then direct the recipient of your SMS to find out more by visiting a web site, contacting your organisation, or reading a specific newspaper.
- It is also important to make sure that you have verified your facts and that the information you're sending out is correct. Make sure to double and even triple check dates and times for public meetings because if you get it wrong you'll have to send out another text message to set the record straight. This will make you look disorganised and it will also deplete your budget, and your subscribers will question whether they can trust your information
- When sending out a text message be aware that you will be reaching a diverse audience of different genders, ages and professions. Your language should always be inclusive and gender sensitive.
- What makes a message worth reading? People like to receive information that helps them make more informed decisions, helps them become involved in actions and activities to improve the quality of their lives and the fate of their country. People need to receive positive and uplifting information rather than messages that will further erode their optimism and self esteem. Therefore it is important to think at length and to seek some broad opinion on the messages you are compiling before you send them out.



Exercise 2: Try it out!

Think about a few issues that are important to you, or up coming events you'd want to communicate with your members, then try and compose a few text messages about these. Test the messages out with your colleagues to get other opinions.

Who is your target audience? _____

What issue do you want to communicate about? _____

Draft your SMS: _____

Think about this!

- Mobile phone messaging should be about interaction, not just pitch. Mobile phones offer a unique opportunity for interaction. Advocacy organizations need to think about mobile phone outreach as a conversation, a way to interact two-way with their constituents.
 - Trust is important because the mobile phone medium is so very personal. Gain permission and offer relevant and timely content.
 - Be relevant. Offer timely news and functional updates that are of interest to your audience.
 - Be multi-media. Integrate your mobile phone outreach and messaging into your entire media and messaging campaign; do not let mobile be an add-on - it shows, and it costs you if not done well.
 - Be varied. Mix up the types of messages you send and what you say in them.
 - Get feedback. Ask other people in the organisation what they think of a text message before you send it out. Ideally, particularly in the early days, you should pilot test some of your messages with a small group of your members and ask what they think of them.
-

Timelines

Make sure you give your organisation enough time months to publicise your SMS campaigns and to compile your SMS database. It may require several different initiatives, over a few months, to build your SMS subscriber database and develop a sense of community around it.

Frequency of messaging

Less is more! A cell phone is a very personal device. It is important not to overwhelm your subscribers with too many messages. If you do they will unsubscribe.

It is important that you inform your constituency about your campaign in some detail so that subscribers know what they are signing up for.

Often your budget and the size of your subscriber list will determine the length of your SMS campaign and how frequently you send out messages.

Processing replies

If you've given your subscribers a number they can contact you on, they'll probably text you from time to time. Sometimes, this may be directly in response to something you've asked them – for example maybe you've texted them to offer to post them an advocacy DVD, and they are replying to you with their address. You can use a spreadsheet programme like Microsoft Excel or Open Office Calc to sort the replies, and to organise the postal addresses and use this information to update your contact details database with subscribers' addresses and cities. At other times, you may have asked for feedback – you can give this feedback a wider audience by using it in a blog, sharing it in an email newsletter, or featuring it in a print publication. Of course, you'll probably also get requests from new members wanting to subscribe – make sure you include them in your subscriber list, and add them to your database before you send out your next message.

Last steps

You're ready to start your SMS campaign! To get other people in your organisation on board, discuss and agree some of the following:

- Reasons for an SMS campaign
- The tone and language of messages your organisation is comfortable being associated with
- How often you'll want to text your subscribers
- How you'll send the messages
- How you will manage, record and respond to subscriber feedback
- Costs of the campaign – include advertising, equipment, message sending costs, and costs of postage, photocopying, envelopes, etc.

Useful additional resources:

1. New Tactics Notebook listing the Amnesty example:
<http://newtactics.org/en/SendingOutanSMS>
2. MobileActive: <http://www.mobileactive.org>
3. FrontlineSMS: <http://frontlinesms.kiwanja.net/>
4. Tactical Technology Collective – Mobiles in-a-box – <http://www.tacticaltech.org>

SMS Campaign in Action

This case study of our experience using SMS to communicate with our members may also give you some ideas . . .

From 300 subscribers as of 1 June 2007, the Kubatana SMS subscriber list grew to over 2,700 subscribers by 31 May 2008. We used SMS to alert people of meetings and events, to draw attention to content on our website, and to share inspiration.

Using Clickatell to send messages, and FrontlineSMS to receive, we were able to develop two-way communications with our subscribers, so that they could take advantage of the convenience of SMS to send us their thoughts and queries. We used this facility to solicit opinion on issues such as HIV/AIDS, price controls, and stay aways, to ask people for their email address to receive a series of articles on relevant issues such as Pius Ncube, MDC unity and the Constitutional Amendment 18, and to invite people to text us their postal address to receive materials from us such as CD's and DVDs.

Examples of text messages we sent include:

- How do we resolve Zimbabwe's leadership crisis? Txt yr email address to 0912 452 201 to receive Political Leaders in Africa: Presidents, Patrons or Profiteers.
- Text your email addr to 0912 452201 for a broader perspective on the Pius Ncube issue. Get your friends to join this service. Kubatana.net keeping you informed.
- Ngazviturwe-Lingathuli-Speak out! To get a copy of the Crisis Coalition CD featuring Chiwoniso, Leonard Zhakata & others txt yr addr to 0912452201. Kubatana.net
- How are water supplies in your area? Circulate the petition to protest ZINWA management. To get a copy txt yr postal or email address to 0912452201. Kubatana.net
- Public meeting - Women and the 2008 elections - Weds 13 June, 2pm, Meikles Hotel. Email wipsu@wipsu.co.zw for info. Kubatana.net - Keeping you informed.

SMS was also a key communications tool during the election period. The growth in our SMS subscriber base was in part due to a variety of advertising approaches in local newspapers. But our subscriber base also doubled in the two weeks surrounding the 29 March Harmonised Election – a period during which we did not flight any advertisements, but in which our SMS service was highly visible.

The House of Assembly and Senate results were released very slowly over the course of several weeks after the election. The Presidential results were only released six weeks after the election. This delay exacerbated the frustrations ordinary Zimbabweans face in accessing information. The state-controlled broadcaster, the lack of an independent daily newspaper, the high cost of the independent weekly newspapers, limited internet and email access and regular power outages that make listening to time-limited independent radio broadcasts difficult, compounded to mean that ordinary Zimbabweans often did not know what was happening in the post-election period. Kubatana sent out regular text messages, often several times a day, during these weeks. We updated our subscribers on the election results as they came in. But importantly, we also countered the fear and challenged the propaganda, by sharing messages of hope and encouragement and by opening our two-way communications service to invite Zimbabweans to share their thoughts, fears and hopes.

Congratulations and thanks for your excellent service in updating us so frequently before, during and after the elections. This is really appreciated.

- BK

Another key component of our SMS campaign is the ability to integrate SMS and post – by offering SMS subscribers materials via post, we reach out to a receptive, interested audience that does not have email or internet access. For example, as the delay in announcing the Presidential election results extended, the National Association of Non Governmental Organisations (NANGO) launched the Make Our Vote Count Campaign, drawing on civil society organisations from all sectors to work together to demand the release of the presidential results.

To generate support for the campaign, we sent this message to 2100 subscribers:

Kubatana! Join the Make Our Vote Count Campaign. Txt your email or physical address to us and we'll send you more information to share with your friends. Sharp!

We had over 200 requests for us to post this document to people and over 150 email requests. We sent out information packs including the Make Our Vote Campaign statement, peace stickers and post cards, and the IDASA report on the delayed election result.

Thanks keep on sending you make us informed on what is taking place I can't get this on TV.
- OM

One of our most powerful campaigns was when, realising that, for the first time since Independence, Zanu PF would not have a majority in Parliament, we asked our subscribers: What do you want in a new Zimbabwe? The response was both humbling and overwhelming. We received replies from over 300 different people with a beautiful range of large and small dreams for the change people want to see in this country. Many people wrote in wanting to see repressive legislation such as POSA and AIPPA repealed, and wanting a new Constitution. Some wrote in about the economy, inflation, health care, education and access to sanitary ware. We blogged some of our subscribers' responses here:

- <http://kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/?p=460>
- <http://kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/?p=465>
- <http://kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/?p=474>