



Get in the Game: Today's Mobile Marketing Landscape

by Alan R. Sultan

The next time you take a walk around your property, keep an eye on what your guests are doing as they sit in restaurants and walk through the hotel lobby or the gaming floor. They're busy sending and reading text messages! If "texting" seems more common today than it was even a year ago, it's not an illusion. According to the Mobile Marketing Association, 53 percent of all mobile phone users send text messages at least once a week, up from 44 percent just last year. More than a third (34 percent) use text messaging daily. According to the Wireless Association, carriers generated over \$3 billion in revenue from mobile messaging in 2006 and that number will only rise.

Today's mobile phones have evolved into intelligent multimedia devices capable of everything from short text messaging to live video. The so-called "third screen" provides a compelling and largely untapped marketing opportunity – and your resort needs to be part of it!

What is Mobile Marketing?

First, some quick and basic definitions to get us started. Mobile marketing is most easily defined as offers or ads that appear on mobile phones or other devices. These might appear as simple text messages (SMS), in media rich formats with graphics and images (MMS), or even full streaming video.

Mobile marketing today is similar to where the Internet was in 1999 – evolving and new, with certain limitations but tons of exciting potential. After all, what is more personal and vital to modern consumers than a mobile phone? People literally feel naked without them, and rely on them not just for conversation, but for text messaging, and overall organization of their time and priorities.

Mobile devices are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their technology. Check out the specs of the latest iPhone, the 3G: Up to 16GB memory, WiFi Internet access, built-in GPS capability, full-color touchscreen... this is more than what laptop computers offered just a few years ago! It won't be long before other manufacturers unveil their own "iPhone-killer." Pretty soon, millions of pockets and purses will be filled with handheld multimedia devices capable of viewing – and responding to – all manner of digital content.

Where to Start

Before we get carried away with the capabilities of these devices, let's clarify that the success of mobile marketing is all about relevance. You need to know what guests like to do and where and when they like to do it. You also, of course, need permission to begin a mobile marketing relationship.

Your existing loyalty program members are an ideal

population for a mobile marketing campaign. Most resorts have made the necessary investment in data collection and have a sense for the tastes of its loyalty program members. The next – and most important – step is to use that data and member knowledge to drive timely and relevant offers.

Is your VIP a sports nut or an aficionado of the arts? Does he prefer blackjack or craps? Would he rather have a steak dinner at a fine dining establishment or hit the latest club? If your guest receives an offer that's relevant to their interests, at the right time and in the right place – a concept called Spot Relevance – they will view mobile marketing as a true benefit. If not, it's seen as spam and can hurt your brand.

To be most effective, your mobile campaign can't exist in a vacuum; your brand promise must be consistent across all media. Companies such as G.A. Wright, which specialize in multi-channel marketing solutions for the gaming industry, ensure message continuity by centralizing the creation and management of all campaigns. Bottom line: mobile marketing messages should have a familiar look and feel to be accepted by guests.

Perhaps what's most powerful about the technology is not just the personalization and immediacy of the message, but the opportunity to leverage time and location. Real-time access to customer data correlated against actual customer location allows you to do amazing things. Say you have a VIP member who is leaving your property. On the way out the door, he receives a branded alert that he has recently earned \$500 in free play. Your VIP will likely make a U-turn and head straight back to your casino. Even if he doesn't, he will likely appreciate the offer.

This "data centric" approach ensures that loyalty members receive personalized information and individually selected incentives to maximize revenue and customer satisfaction. Another compelling aspect of mobile marketing is the data collection capability. You will know exactly who sees offers, who responds and what they do. Response rates are incredible – upwards of 30 percent – because customers receive offers they have requested, not intrusions. Plus, this data can be used to enhance the effectiveness of other marketing channels.

Keep in mind that none of this is as intimidating as it sounds. You've already done the heavy lifting by collecting and using customer data. You know all about your guests and you use that knowledge right now to create targeted direct mail and online marketing campaigns. An intelligent mobile campaign operates on the same principles of engaging your guests in a personalized way – but with way more possibilities than any other channel.

How it Works: A Mobile Campaign in Action

Mobile marketing opens up two huge possibilities that traditional media can only dream about: Time and location.

With traditional media, your guests receive your offer at home, reflect on its value and, if they find it worthwhile, save it for their next visit. Then they need to bring the physical piece (if it's a coupon) to extract the value. With mobile marketing, offers can be received, considered and used instantly.

To become activated in your property's "mobile rewards" program, guests simply download an application to their phone, which takes only a minute and is compatible with a wide range of devices and all the major wireless carriers. Then the interaction begins for the consumer and the resort. Guests can push a single button and automatically connect to customer service, the concierge desk, real-time comp and billing updates, and more.

Let's say one of your on-premise restaurants typically experiences a lull from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays. At 1 p.m. all participating guests receive an offer on their phone for a \$50 discount if they dine during that period. Redemption is easy; they simply show the offer to the restaurant host and they're set.

It gets better. The technology exists to send those same offers to other guests as they walk by the entrance to the restaurant during those times. These offers may be prepped with a simple text message asking if the user would like to view a special offer from the resort. Offers go out via either "push" or "pull," which means that in addition to alerts you send (push), your customers can search for offers and "pull" them down.

Time and location targeting can be extended to help you fill empty seats at shows or generate more action in specific areas of the casino floor, at the moment you recognize the need. When time and location are combined with guest data, this "mobile trifecta" can help you maximize revenues but create powerful marketing opportunities that your guests will perceive as relevant and personalized.

If all of this sounds too good to be true, it's not. It's happening now and the technology and opportunities will only expand. It's time for your property to get in the game and open a new world of loyalty and appreciation. ♣

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