



Short Codes and Cell Phones

Transform Medical Aesthetic Marketing

By Cheryl Whitman, Contributing Editor

Along with the latest clinical procedures, it is essential for aesthetic professionals and practices to stay current with emerging marketing trends and technologies. It's a key to staying ahead of the competition. High-tech marketing options have never been so dynamic or effective. The concept of mobile marketing – brief text messages sent for marketing purposes – is relatively new, but its potential for instant, direct-to-consumer contact is already well established and its application for the medical aesthetic field is highly promising.



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Average Number of Monthly Calls vs. Text Messages Among U.S. Wireless Subscribers by Age (Q2 2008)

	Calls	Texts
Overall average	204	357
12 and under	137	428
Ages 13-17	231	1742
Ages 18-24	265	790
Ages 25-34	239	331
Ages 35-44	223	236
Ages 45-54	193	128
Ages 55-64	145	38
Ages 65+	99	14

Source: The Nielsen Company

Cell phones and text messaging are fully entrenched in the American communication lifestyle, and where consumers go, creative marketing solutions are sure to follow. Mobile marketing is on the cutting edge and its effectiveness and simplicity make it a powerful new tool in promotional campaigns.

Short codes are special telephone numbers, typically between four and six digits long. Unlike regular ten digit phone numbers, you cannot call a short code number; they are used for texting purposes only. A mobile keyword is a one word phrase that identifies a product, service, action or business. The mobile keyword is texted to a short code number to receive additional information or to join a mobile distribution list.

It is estimated that, on average, people look at their cell phones between 20 and 24 times each day. According to new research from The Nielsen Company (Florence, Ky.) and *The New York Times*, roughly 57% of the nation’s 263 million cell phone users text message on a regular basis. Text messaging has, in fact, overtaken cell phone conversation since 2006, growing from an average of 65 text messages per month to more than 350 among U.S. wireless subscribers. At the close of 2008, more text messages were being sent and received in the U.S. than phone calls. The most surprising part of this news is that it’s not just teenagers and college students who are texting. The study shows that adults between the ages of 35 and 44 – a target market for many aesthetic practices – do more texting than calling.

According to a recent study by Universal McCann (New York, N.Y.) and AOL (New York, N.Y.); in the U.S., one out of every seven minutes of media consumption takes place on a mobile device (cell phone, iPhone or Blackberry). Many people use their cell phones to peruse news headlines, take and view digital images and video, contact friends and colleagues on social networking sites and even find their way around with global positioning applications. Therefore, it’s not surprising that mobile marketing is emerging as a first choice for many business segments and a wide variety of businesses are incorporating short code response keys into mainstream media such as radio, billboard and print advertising.

Mobile marketing is a great way to track and measure the effectiveness of traditional promotional campaigns. According to a survey by ABI Research (Oyster Bay, N.Y.) in 2008, 63% of consumers who were neutral to short code marketing nominated a discount coupon as the incentive they would most likely respond to. Mobile coupon use increased by 119% percent in the second half of 2008, and the redemption rate of mobile coupons tripled during the same timeframe among those aged 34 and over.

Restaurant and retail outlets are ramping up their short code marketing efforts to keep in touch with customers and provide special offers. Kentucky Fried Chicken (Louisville, Ky.), McDonalds (Oak Brook, Ill.) and Sony (New York, N.Y.) recently ranked as the top three in marketing appeal to mobile subscribers. Companies like Coca-Cola (Atlanta, Ga.), Nestle (Vevey, Switzerland), Subway (Milford, Conn.), Papa Johns (Louisville, Ky.), Molson Coors (Denver, Colo.), Panasonic (Osaka, Japan), Best Buy (Richfield, Minn.), Ashley Furniture (Arcadia, Wis.), Volkswagen (Hillsboro, Ore.), as well as service-oriented businesses such as Supercuts hair salons, a division of Regis



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Corporation (Minneapolis, Minn.), H&R Block (Kansas City, Mo.) and Jiffy Lube (Houston, Texas) are also fully engaged in the mobile marketing phenomenon.

Every day, millions of consumers register for contests, surveys, special offers and discount programs via text message. Mobile and keyword marketing methods are showing impact levels that exceed direct mail, e-mail and other traditional marketing channels, with an estimated read rate of 90% and a 25% response rate in some segments.

Mobile marketing is a simple, affordable and effective way to promote a brand image. What's more, cutting down on printing and paper expenses is not only cost-effective; it's also eco-friendly. A well crafted text message, limited to 160 characters or less, is just enough to extend an invitation or call to action, and provide a quick and easy method of response.

The interactive aspect of text messaging is almost limitless. In a three month period in 2008, Nielsen reported tracking more than 1 million transactions with the short code ALICE, which is assigned to a radio station in San Francisco, Calif. that frequently takes requests and contest entries from listeners via text messages. Multimedia options are also expanding at a staggering rate. Product photos, full color coupons, scannable barcodes and even streaming video are just some of the ways to capture the attention of clients in a mobile marketing campaign.

Like e-mail and web based promotions, short code marketing is a traffic builder for many retail businesses and it works for aesthetic practices as well. In addition to marketing, there are business functions that can be enhanced through the use of text messaging. It is not yet commonplace, but aesthetic practitioners can purchase an automated service that confirms client appointments through short code technology. The system can be used to fill last minute openings in the schedule and provide same day booking discounts.

Getting started with mobile marketing requires some research and gathering of subscribers. You may decide to begin with Twitter (San Francisco, Calif.) and have clients follow you to get news and promotions from your practice via cell phone. Twitter has been a popular mobile networking and marketing tool since 2006 with overwhelming public response. According to Twitter executives, simplicity has played an important role in the system's success.

Before you can use a mobile marketing and Twitter combination you have to build your internal database by adding cell phone numbers. If your database is not up to date, you can create a special promotion to invite former and current clients to opt in to your mobile marketing program, and reward them with discount coupons or added value on services or skincare products. Trumpia (Seoul, Korea), offers services that give clients the option to follow you without having to sign up for Twitter or any other networking site. Clients can simply text your mobile keyword to a short code and start receiving your text messages instantly. Trumpia promotes an all in one messaging system that interacts simultaneously with all the major social networking sites including Twitter, Facebook (Palo Alto, Calif.) and MySpace (Beverly Hills, Calif.).



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Another way to build your mobile marketing database is through the resources of digital marketing companies, like ProMark Data and Media Group (Boca Raton, Fla.). These specialized agencies can provide access to millions of mobile phone users, who are pre-screened, double opted-in and segmented according to dozens of criteria including: demographics, geography and many psychographic characteristics such as: credit ranking and hobbies. Subscriber lists can also be sorted by pre-selected interest areas such as health and beauty or fitness.

After you've begun to build your list, the next step is to design a mobile marketing campaign that will get results. Rewards programs, discount coupons and direct purchase invitations can be extremely successful – as long as the value is high and there is an expiration date. Remember that any discounts or enticements you offer should be of genuine value – something that clients wouldn't want to pass up.

Be sure your plan has a built-in benefit for both you and the client. Refer-a-friend or bring-a-spouse promotions can help to build your database and ensure repeat business as well. Just as in traditional marketing, short code marketing provides an opportunity for you to promote your brand image in creative ways. Using a vanity code like BEAUTY or even an abbreviation of your practice name for your short code can help to keep you on your clients' minds.

Naturally, there are guidelines that govern cell phone marketing. As with e-mail promotions, consumers must opt in and have an easy method for opting out of any future contact. The Common Short Code Administration / Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association - The Wireless Association (Washington, D.C.) and the Mobile Marketing Association (New York, N.Y.) provide information, guidance and best practices for going mobile with a marketing campaign. They are also good sources of news and trends on the interactive aspects and latest multimedia options available for mobile marketers.

Adapting mobile marketing technology for an aesthetic practice requires a bit of planning and ingenuity. There are some rules to follow, but using the medium itself is really simple. It can provide you with a new and engaging way to keep the conversation going with your clients – and stay ahead of your competition. ■



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