



# TXT WE CAN

OBAMA FOR AMERICA AND DISTRIBUTIVE NETWORKS  
UNLOCK THE POWER OF THE MOBILE CHANNEL



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For Immediate Release

## KEY LESSONS INCLUDE:

1. Seize control of the mobile channel
2. Build the opt-in list aggressively
3. Develop robust participant profiles
4. Optimize message frequency
5. Leverage mobile's unique strengths

**President-elect Barack Obama** ran the most technologically sophisticated campaign in history, and his campaign's unprecedented deployment of the mobile channel, in particular, now stands as a best practice for marketers across industries and across the globe.

No other candidate, cause, or brand has ever launched such a wide-reaching, long-running, sophisticated mobile outreach effort. To illustrate, Nielsen Mobile reported that Obama's text message announcement of Joe Biden as his running mate was "the single largest mobile marketing event in the US, to date" and "one of the most important text messages ever sent and one of the most successful brand engagements using mobile media." (#1)

Using Distributive Networks' powerful mobile marketing platform, Obama for America was able to leverage the mobile channel to engage supporters, mobilize volunteers, and propel voters to the polls. Distributive Networks was proud to serve as a trusted partner in this historic campaign, and to share five key lessons that emerge from Obama for America's effectiveness in mobile marketing.



"Welcome to Obama Mobile NEWS & UPDATES. Reply with your zipcode to get local Obama info. Text HELP for help, STOP to quit. Std text charges apply."



Lesson 1.

# SEIZE CONTROL OF THE MOBILE CHANNEL

The Obama for America campaign committed early to the idea of a mobile communications strategy, and immediately recognized the importance of taking an active approach to their mobile channel. The campaign secured a dedicated short code (62262, which spells OBAMA) so its communications team could ensure control of all of the messaging related to their campaign and avoid the pitfalls that are commonplace with the use of shared short codes (see sidebar, “Story of a Shared Short Code Snafu”). The campaign’s branded short code was integrated into outreach on all other media—ranging from yard signs to radio spots to Obama’s prime-time 30-minute TV commercial—with full confidence that the 62262 short code, like the campaign’s website, would be running for the duration of the campaign, and would be associated only with Obama for America.

The dedicated short code allowed the campaign to develop an unlimited number of customized keywords that provided participants with immediate targeted responses and designated them for even more targeted communications on an ongoing basis. Obama for America activated more than 50,000 unique keywords on its short code, everything from IRAQ to JOBS for issue interests, to FL or OH or any other state name, to custom keyword polls shown real-time on the Jumbotron at campaign events, custom keywords used to recruit volunteers in specific areas, and every U.S. zip code.

In addition to micro-targeted keywords, the campaign could manage, monitor, and quickly respond to each of the millions of “free-form” inbound text messages, which include supporters’ comments during debates, questions about the candidate’s policies, and requests for information about how to volunteer or vote. With a shared short code, or with a less sophisticated mobile marketing platform, these inbound messages would simply disappear. Obama for America’s active ownership of the mobile channel ensured that the campaign could make the most of every interaction, and to provide a positive and engaging experience for supporters.

## STORY OF A SHARED SHORT CODE SNAFU:

John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and the Republican National Committee all launched mobile marketing campaigns during the 2008 election, all using shared short codes. A columnist attempted to send his zip code to the short code used by Hillary Clinton’s campaign, hoping to be able to receive more local information about her campaign, but instead received information about the nearest low-cost health care clinic. It quickly became clear that another organization was using the same short code for a “clinic-finder” function. This example provides a vivid cautionary tale about the dangers of a passive approach to the mobile channel that cedes any control of the channel’s content to other parties – risks that the Obama for America campaign was careful to avoid.<sup>(#2)</sup>





Lesson 2.

# BUILD THE OPT-IN LIST **AGGRESSIVELY**

**Unlike any other direct marketing medium**, lists cannot be purchased; a database of mobile numbers must be built from the ground up. Furthermore, Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) guidelines, which are dutifully enforced by wireless carriers, stipulate that end users must explicitly make the first contact, expressly “opting in” to participate. Understanding these differences, Obama for America invested heavily in building its mobile opt-in list through incentives, integrated communications, and sustained advertising.



Opt-in instructions were placed at the forefront on yard signs – and every other outlet

In June 2007, Obama for America began offering free ringtones and wallpapers on its website as incentives for supporters to opt-in to the mobile program. In addition, the campaign used a limited-time-offer giveaway in the form of a special bumper sticker to participants who signed up by June 30. This created tremendous viral effects among the electorate and resulted in a tremendous amount of earned media, including the lead story on “The Daily Show” by Jon Stewart within one day of the launch of the mobile campaign.

Obama for America worked to reach the widest possible audience with a simple call-to-action to join the mobile campaign. The candidate’s television ad during 2008 Super Bowl, for example, invited viewers to text the word HOPE to 62262 to learn more about Obama’s candidacy, resulting in a huge increase in the size of the mobile database, as well as another fresh round of earned media attention. The campaign deployed unique keywords in each of the media channels used, allowing them to track the effectiveness of each channel to drive list growth.

By the time Obama had secured the Democratic Party nomination, speculation was rampant about who would be his running mate. Again, the campaign seized upon the opportunity to build the mobile list – and to provide voters with a direct communications channel to the campaign. Obama for America invited anyone interested in the nominee to text VP to 62262 to receive the campaign’s first official announcement. Again, this resulted in a massive increase in the size of the mobile list and extensive earned media coverage. Nielsen Mobile estimates that more than 2.9 million text messages were sent to Obama Mobile participants during the weekend of the announcement.



“Show your support with official Obama gear! Visit <http://Store.BarackObama.com> & use promo code: TEXT08 at checkout for a 20% discount thru April 30th.”



Lesson 3.

# DEVELOP ROBUST PARTICIPANT PROFILES

**While investments in building the opt-in list enabled the campaign** to engage the broadest possible audience for broadcast messages, they also focused on the depth of their database, so they could deliver much more targeted messages as appropriate to specific constituents. Typically, the only data points captured during a mobile marketing opt-in process are the end-user’s phone number, their mobile operator, and the date and time of their message. Distributive Networks’ technology made it possible for the Obama campaign to create a dialogue with participants via text messaging that generated well-rounded participant profiles, including zip codes and address information, interest in various issues, and the ability and willingness to volunteer and to travel to help the campaign in battleground states.



Custom keywords (like “PLEDGE,” used at this event in Sunrise, Florida) helped deepen candidates’ understanding of participants’ interests, locations, and more.

Obama for America was able to vary the type of messages based on what each participant had thus far volunteered, at each step seizing opportunities to gather more information. To encourage participants to provide more information, the campaign used incentives like campaign merchandise giveaways, VIP invitations to events, and even opportunities to meet the candidate in person.

Distributive Networks also enabled the campaign to use “smart” keywords to generate dynamic, rules-based responses to incoming messages. For example, a supporter who texted in the keyword VOL to volunteer would receive an immediate response asking for their zip code if their profile did not include one, or the immediate, substantive response tailored to their zip code if their profile already included it.

In each case, Obama for America increased the depth of its participant profiles and thus enabled very targeted, informed messaging on an ongoing basis – and perhaps most importantly to drive voters to their specific polls on election day. More than 80% of the participants in the Obama for America mobile campaign submitted additional profile information and received tailored messages across the duration of the campaign.



“Help Barack win Virginia! If you can travel to VA between now and Nov 4th, REPLY to this msg with: T2VA & your NAME (ex: T2VA Ann) Yes We Can! - Haley at Obama HQ.”



Lesson 4.

# OPTIMIZE MESSAGE FREQUENCY

**Mobile is unique among marketing channels** not only because it is such a personal and immediate form of communication, but because participants must pay for the ability to send and receive text messages. While over-messaging in other channels such as television and email can be viewed as an annoyance, over-messaging in a mobile campaign will drive participants away and runs the risk of significant backlash.



The Obama campaign maximized the information provided in just 160 characters, making each “touch” count.

Obama for America carefully considered the content of its messaging to ensure that it was relevant, timely, and likely interesting to recipients. Central to this strategy was the campaign’s ability to tailor outbound messages to the participant profiles, so that supporters could learn about their local events and polling information, for example, in addition to key nation-wide updates about the presidential debates and a fundraising drive during Hurricane Gustav. In all cases, the campaign ensured that participants would find sufficient value in the content and that they would not feel overburdened by the frequency of contact – particularly those with little experience with text messaging.

Meanwhile, the campaign understood and avoided the related risk of under-messaging. Users who opt in to a mobile campaign but receive only sporadic content will be much more inclined to opt out, and have fewer opportunities to share campaign content with their friends and drive viral participation. The campaign ensured that participants received a steady stream of messages that kept participants’ interest piqued, striking an optimal balance between over- and under-messaging. A typical Obama Mobile supporter received from 5 to 20 messages per month, depending on the depth of their requested involvement and the stage of the campaign. The campaign intensified messaging in the final days before the election, a strategy that proved to be a critical driver of record-breaking turnout among Obama voters on November 4.



“One hour until polls close in Pennsylvania! Tell your friends they have the right to vote if they are in line by 8pm. Help make history, fwd this msg to everyone!”



**Lesson 5.**

# LEVERAGE MOBILE'S UNIQUE STRENGTHS



The Obama campaign's website enabled one-stop shopping for text alerts and downloadable content

There are four characteristics of the mobile messaging channel that distinguish it from other media:

- 1) Ubiquity**  
Mobile messaging is affordable for end users, and penetration in the United States is 84% and still climbing; nearly everyone has and uses a mobile phone on a daily basis.<sup>(#3)</sup>
- 2) Interactivity**  
Mobile messaging allows for interactive two-way communication, providing instant gratification and enabling personal relationship-building.
- 3) Immediacy**  
Mobile messages have the highest chance of reaching a recipient wherever they are, and within moments of being sent. On average, incoming text messages are read within 15 minutes of receipt.<sup>(#4)</sup>
- 4) Impact**  
Mobile communications spur recipients to act, whether to purchase a product, make a donation, attend an event, share information with a friend, or any other call to action. Text message reminders have been found to increase the likelihood of an individual voting by 4.2 percentage points.<sup>(#5)</sup>

The Obama campaign quickly grasped how to leverage these unique characteristics into winning mobile strategies for the primaries and the general election. The campaign was able to reach voters across demographics, interact with them in a personal way, provide updated and real-time information that was tailored to individual users, and to spur supporters to action by attending events, contributing funds, and volunteering. These efforts culminated in the campaign's sustained get-out-the-vote strategy with targeted reminders, registration information, early voting details, polling locations, and election-day help services – all delivered via text message. In each case, the unique attributes of mobile messaging were leveraged to create a rewarding, engaging relationship between Obama for America and the voters.



"Rally with Barack in St. Louis this Sat! Under the Gateway Arch, Memorial Dr & Market St. Doors: 10:15am. Free & open to public. My.BarackObama.com/STL. Fwd msg."



## WHAT'S NXT IN TXT

Obama for America has been honored with the 2008 Golden Dot Award for Best Mobile/Text Messaging Campaign and the 2008 Global Messaging Award, which stated, "To date, no other political campaign or non-profit has offered so comprehensive or so effective a mobile messaging program, and one so well customized for the true nature of the mobile medium." The campaign is also a finalist for the Mobile Marketing Association's North America Award for "Best Mobile Marketing Campaign: Relationship-Building;" the winner will be announced November 13, 2008.



The campaign's pioneering use of mobile channel was just one of the factors that resulted in Obama's election to the Presidency, but these five lessons serve as powerful takeaways that all organizations and brands can now emulate, and Distributive Networks looks forward to helping many more organizations achieve their objectives with the mobile channel.

### ABOUT DISTRIBUTIVE NETWORKS

Distributive Networks has been proud to serve as the primary mobile partner and technology provider for the Obama for America campaign. Founded in 2004 and privately held, Distributive Networks has quickly become one of the most successful and esteemed mobile technology companies in North America. The company's proprietary mobile content management and delivery system enables innovative, customized mobile messaging solutions for clients across industries, including media, sports, politics, consumer products, education and public relations.

Distributive Networks enables its clients to reach and interact with millions of mobile device users via text alerts, coupons, content downloads, real-time polling, in-venue engagement, WAP services and more – and provides creative consulting, detailed analytics and end-to-end customer service support and to ensure the success of each mobile campaign. Distributive Networks also offers a catalogue of more than 100 titles of original short-form content, providing partners with powerful additional revenue and branding opportunities.

Headquartered in Washington D.C., Distributive Networks serves a portfolio of prestigious clients including Obama for America, AOL, AT&T, Armani Exchange, Avis/Budget, BET, Boost Mobile, Cable & Wireless, D.C. United, Disney Studios, Fleishman-Hillard, Jamba!, Kaiser Permanente, MTV, Tracfone, VeriSign, Vodafone, Viacom and the Washington Capitals.

### TO LEARN MORE

With the release of this brief, Distributive Networks is now offering the powerful mobile platform and strategic expertise that helped propel President-elect Obama to the White House to its roster of clients. For more information on how you can tap into these lessons learned, and harness the power of the mobile channel for your organization, please contact us at [lessons@distributivenetworks.com](mailto:lessons@distributivenetworks.com). For your own copy of this brief, please visit [distributivenetworks.com/obama](http://distributivenetworks.com/obama).

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