

Text-Blast Away

This software helps send your message to millions of mobile phones—and their users—with a click of the mouse.

TECHNOLOGY HAS ADVANCED so much that nowadays even small businesses have more options on how to make their messages known to their target markets. Gone are the days when print, radio, television and billboards were the only advertising channels available, because advertising via short messaging service or SMS is very much gaining popularity.

In the Philippines, most companies have recognized SMS as a legitimate and important advertising medium due mainly to its speed, coverage and affordability.

The expected surge of demand for SMS-enabled advertising motivated Melvin Dave Vivas, owner and chief consultant of Melvin Dave I.T. Consulting Services, to develop and distribute EnableSMS Suite, a software which allows “text-blasting” by using a computer instead of a mobile phone.

Previously, people resorted to Internet-based SMS providers (like local company Chikka.com) to text-blast their audiences, but what was touted as a free service actually wasn't; people replying to these messages were charged double the rate of a regular sent SMS, so they wound up shouldering the cost the sender should have paid.

This texting via the Internet gave way to the unlimited SMS promotions being offered by the local telecommunications companies. However, it still posed a problem for SMS-based advertisers: it required someone to use a mobile phone round-the-clock to text-blast, leading to many sore fingers (and irate recipients who wanted no part of the text message they unwittingly received).

Now, a business doesn't need a 24/7 Internet connection or even a mobile phone to text-blast. It only needs a computer (installed with the EnableSMS software), a USB modem (like those offered by the major telcos for broadband Internet) and a SIM card to beam its message directly to mobile phone users everywhere—provided, of course, that a business has a database of its target recipients' cellphone numbers to begin its SMS broadcast with.



MELVIN DAVE VIVAS (right) and Tech Director DENNIS BUGAYONG simplify text-blasting, giving small businesses more bang for the buck.

That's why in just over a year of operation, Melvin Dave's business has grown by leaps, with more and more clients recognizing the benefits of the software.

“EnableSMS Suite is a great investment for those looking for alternatives in advertising to a market of approximately 60 million people [the estimated number of Filipinos who have a mobile phone],” says Vivas. “This number is still growing, which could mean more sales leads, more customers and more chances to profit for businesses.”

“Compared to the more traditional modes of advertising, advertising through SMS is definitely more targeted and more cost efficient,” he adds.

The software is ideal in updating potential and current customers on a business' new products and services. In a couple of clicks, messages can be sent to a list of target customers of any size and category. It can also be used to activate SMS-based raffle contests, mobile voting, dispatching job orders, confirming reservations or bookings, and sending electronic coupons and newsletters.

EnableSMS allows sending to multiple recipients with their mobile phone numbers

saved in a Comma Separated Value (CSV), Microsoft Excel or MS Access file, says Vivas. There is no limit when sending out SMS. Vivas says one of his present clients is sending text messages to nearly 40,000 customers with an average sending rate of 10 to 15 text messages per minute.

And because this software can also receive SMS, it may also be used as a feedback system that enables customers to express what they think about your products or services. This is particularly important for businesses in the hospitality and food service industries.

“Receiving SMS is pretty straightforward. The software has an interface similar to any e-mail software. And just like any e-mail software, received messages can be stored in different folders. One can also immediately reply to received SMS,

which is definitely easier and more efficient compared to replying using a mobile phone. And if backing up [saving] of SMS messages is what you need, the software can export SMS to an HTML or a CSV file,” Vivas adds.

Small and start-up businesses can easily afford the software: a unit of EnableSMS Suite costs only P6,500, unlike other similar software selling as much as P170,000 per unit, according to Vivas.

“Our target is to sell 200-300 units by January 2010. To achieve this, we pooled together a team of sales agents who will contact potential clients such as real-estate firms, travel agencies, hotels, schools, government agencies and even IT firms,” says Vivas. “Any company can use EnableSMS Suite as long as they want to take advantage of the technology in growing their business revenues.” That's how Melvin Dave has put technology within the reach of the small entrepreneur. —Jet Ramos

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