

*digital*

# SMS-Based Surveys

## Engaging with the Mobile Consumer

Few people would know the name of Neil Papworth, an engineer who sent the world's first SMS (Short Message Service) from a computer to a mobile phone in December 1992. The text message was 'Happy Christmas' to Richard Jarvis via the Vodafone network.

Fast forward to today and latest research indicates that 'texting' has become the most popular mobile data application in the world, with approximately 6.1 trillion messages sent in 2010 – just under 200,000 a second - according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), part of the United Nations.



The ITU predicts that among the 5.3 billion mobile phone subscribers at the end of 2010, the largest proportion (3.8 billion) will be from the developing world.

These trends are providing both opportunities and challenges for clients and accordingly, market research companies should seriously consider reinventing themselves to better serve clients' needs in a more complex and demanding world by using modern methods with 21st century solutions.

One such method is using SMS as a research tool. SMS-based surveys can have major advantages over traditional research methods and can be an innovative tool for research institutes to use in a competitive market.

Global broadband and telecommunications provider Telefonica commissioned GfK CR Brasil to conduct a study into how SMS could potentially work in an after-sales customer satisfaction survey. The research was designed to

assist Telefonica's mobile phone business unit to manage the customer experience at their stores in Brazil.

The survey covered a sample of customers receiving services at its 271 stores. People received an SMS message asking them to rate the service they had just received from a particular store. To encourage a response, all replies were free of charge.



As with any other data collection methodology, SMS-based surveys have limitations, especially when it comes to the target market. Like web-based surveys, SMS-based research has a greater chance of reaching people who are familiar with the technology and

use it on a daily basis. Consumers who find using text messages easy, regularly use text messages to chat with friends and colleagues and are unlikely to think that receiving an SMS is inconvenience. This group is also more likely to respond to SMS-based surveys.

This difference in attitudes compared with non-mobile phone enthusiasts is also reflected in the difference in the average respondents' profile. Customers answering SMS-based surveys tend to be younger, have a higher level of education (graduate and post-graduate qualifications), have their mobile phone on a contract (rather than pre-paid), be wealthier than the average person and be single.

Although SMS-based surveys have a notable quantitative weakness in terms of reaching all relevant consumers, this method of data capture has huge potential to reach young and high-end consumers. When placed within the wider context

of market research, SMS-based surveys can be used by market research executives as a powerful tool to provide tactical information to their clients which is as reliable as any other collected by traditional methods, but at a significantly lower cost and much more speedily.



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