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**Tech Trends Newsletter****Word power: Text message marketing proves effective, economical**

By Dave Wolkowitz

Marketing via mobile phone text messaging can be an effective way for restaurants to build deeper relationships with their guests.

From a guest's perspective, the process of mobile phone marketing starts at the "opt-in" stage, at which point the guest sends a text message that includes a restaurant-specific code to a special "shortened" telephone number. (Operators can see how the system works by sending a text message with the code "Demo1" to the shortened number 30364.) Once guests enroll in the system, they then receive promotional text messages that correspond to the restaurant whose code was entered upon enrollment. Restaurant operators administer the timing, frequency and content of messages that are sent to guests.

Among mobile phone marketing systems providers used by restaurant operators are Phoenix-based Cellit Mobile Marketing and Chicago-based Opt It.

Brian Matzkow, owner of fine-dining Sapa restaurant in New York, uses Cellit's system to connect with his core customer base.

"People always have their cell phones with them, and text messaging is growing in popularity," Matzkow says. "Cell phone marketing helps me reach my target market, because anyone who would opt in to the system via their phone number is obviously someone very interested in the restaurant."

Matzkow says he uses his mobile marketing system to attract guests during nonpeak hours and to highlight specific menu items.

"The biggest thing I do is send out offers — fun things like messages with a password that guests have to use to get a free drink or a special dish. I've also sent out invitations for special events," he says.

Matzkow promotes enrollment into the system via his website and in the restaurant. Guests are enticed to enroll in the system by contests featuring such prizes as a dinner for two or a \$500 bar tab.

Greg Pyne, owner of Atlanta's full-service Brooklyn Café, agreed that

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Cellit's system effectively reaches his restaurant's core customer base. He uses the system to promote special offers and also says he thinks advertising via mobile phones helps differentiate his restaurant.



"It lets me keep in contact with customers who have gone out of their way to be a part of the system," Pyne says. "And it's unique, so people talk about the restaurant because of this type of marketing. Customers can opt in and out immediately, so it's never too bothersome. I only send out one message a month, because I don't want the cell phone coupon to become something they regret signing up for."

Pyne also offers incentives to encourage guests to enroll in the system.

"I offer a free dessert with dinner if they sign up before the last course," he says. "That motivates like you wouldn't believe. It costs a bit on the front end, but then I have the customers' contact information, which I see as the real value."

According to David Wachs, president of Cellit, mobile marketing systems hold unique advantages over other marketing mediums.

"Cell phone marketing is very efficient, particularly when one considers that guests have asked to receive a restaurant's message," he says. "While advertising is often viewed as clutter to be ignored, guests look forward to Cellit's text messages, because they have opted into the system."

Wachs pointed out that operators can tweak messages based on feedback in Cellit's Web-based administration tool, which tracks specific offer response rates and the responses of specific guests. By scheduling messages according to message content, operators can promote business during certain dayparts, he says. For instance, a restaurant could send out a message just before midday to promote its lunch business.

Brian Stafford, co-founder of Opt It, says mobile phone marketing systems enable restaurants build stronger ties with a younger demographic than is targeted by traditional frequent diner programs.

"The guests enjoy being in control of the messages they receive," he says.