“Getting the message”

The SMS revolution and its potential for the global conservation and development effort

Ken Banks, kiwanja.net
Presentation outline

- A very short history of SMS
- Texting by numbers
- “I’m fired?” Strange things can happen by text...
- Text messaging: A social revolution
- Removing the SMS barriers...
- The FrontlineSMS story
- Questions (and perhaps some answers)
A short history of SMS

‘Invented’ by Finnish civil servant Matti Makkonen in 1982

The first text message was sent by Neil Papworth on December 3rd, 1992 in the UK on the Vodafone network.

It was sent to Richard Jarvis, a Vodafone executive.

The first message? “Merry Christmas!”

Liftoff: But it wasn’t until 1998 that text messages could be sent across different UK networks...
Mobile phone numbers

- 133,000,000 UK text messages sent over new year 2005/6
- On average 3,000,000 messages are sent in the UK every hour
- 217.76 billion texts were sent in China throughout 2004
- An estimated 43% of SMS’s are spam we never get to see

- Mobile penetration in Europe is set to hit 100% by 2007
- Over 2 billion people own mobile phones globally
- Around 400,000,000 of those live in China alone
- SMS is being increasingly used in a wide range of ‘activities’..
Strange Messaging Service

Before we get serious...

... time for some of the more ‘unusual’ uses of SMS
“ur sacked...”

Bust company sacks workers by text

The UK's largest personal injury claims firm, Accident Group, has sacked 2,400 people - many by text message - after its parent company Amulet Group announced on Friday that it would go into administration.

Staff with company mobile phones received a series of text messages, warning them that salaries would not be paid.

Manchester-based Amulet Group said its subsidiary had to cease trading because it could not sustain its "continual battles with the insurance industry" and after "the sudden failure of a banking partner to support the company".

The administrators, though, blame Accident Group's "lower than expected claims success rate" for the financial difficulties, which they say "resulted in increased insurance premiums on now business and retrospective claims from the underwriters".
“ur fired…”

Prime Minister
Sibusiso Dlamini

His Majesty King Mswati III of
The Kingdom of Swaziland
Malaysia has updated an Islamic Sharia law which permits men to end a marriage by repeating the simple phrase “talaq” (I divorce thee) three times. Taking new technologies into account, an Islamic law court in Malaysia said it would recognise a divorce if an Islamic man sent the phrase three times to his spouse.

(Reported 28th July 2003 - “SMS Divorce to be Banned” - 31st July)
"Bible cre8td 4 a nu wrld"

In da Bginnin God cre8d da heavens & da earth. Da earth waz barren, wit no 4m of life; it waz unda a roaring ocean cuvred wit dRkness...

Genesis Chapter 1, Verses 1-2
“Put the kettle on…”

(According to a PG Tips spokesperson):

“This could revolutionise tea-time. Now there is no excuse for not putting the kettle on”
In South Africa a local doctor has developed a pill bottle that uses mobile technology to remind patients to take their medicines and warns them if they are about to take an extra dose by mistake.
Socially beneficial SMS

Text messaging is being successfully used in countries such as Nigeria and South Africa to provide health information on disease and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.
Socially beneficial SMS

New technology in Uganda is helping farmers find out the real price of their crops – and avoid being cheated by unscrupulous middlemen...
Socially beneficial SMS

One World in Kenya provide a job information service aimed at blue-collar workers and employers offering details of jobs in more than 40 categories from carpenters to secretaries.
At least five countries have begun developing an alert system using cell phone text messages, a response to the catastrophic Asian tsunami that exposed flaws in present-day early warning schemes.
"British mobile phone users have donated over £1m to the Disasters Emergency tsunami appeal fund using text messages"

Computing Magazine, Jan 2005
Socially beneficial SMS

SMS early warning systems can mitigate against human/wildlife conflict around national parks
Removing SMS barriers ........................

The use of text messaging to provide a wide range of useful, relevant content to local communities is clear...

So why aren’t we all doing it? (assuming you want to)
Removing SMS barriers

Technical: Which system is best for me?

Knowledge: A reluctance to share experiences

Cost: The price to implement SMS services?

Suitability: Few systems developed for NGOs

Simplicity: Solutions need to be low maintenance

Infrastructure: Needs to work in remote areas
Constructing a solution

Share: A place to talk about NGOs and SMS use

Cost: A low cost, works out-of-the-box solution

Suitability: Developed with NGO community in mind

Simplicity: Simple, intuitive, low maintenance

Independence: Using widely available GSM networks

Implementation: ‘Top down’ and ‘Bottom up’
FrontlineSMS ingredients

- Laptop
- Cable
- PCMCIA Modem
- Mobile
Thank you

“As we sit with our broadband connected computers, surfing the web, rattling off email and IMs, Skyping intercontinentally and publishing our ideas and opinions all over the world with blogging software, it's easy to forget that much of the world just isn't like that. Broadband connections (or even dear old dial-up connections) are a rarity in much of the developing world, including (but not limited) to the massive populations of China, India and Africa...”