



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

#### *Mobile media set to spark the next marketing gold rush*

The world of cell phones is a buzz of activity these days. Telus narrowly missed a consumer revolt over their nearly ill fated foray into downloadable porn. Announced without fanfare, guided by greed, and flying in the face of any corporate social strategy, it's hard to believe it was planned to roll out less than a month before call number portability came into effect. Of course now all providers are tripping over themselves to spread the love. With all the new capabilities of mobile technology out there, could it be that there is more at stake than making and receiving a few phone calls? You bet!

There is an entire industry dedicated to making your cell phone do more. Much more. It's called mobile media. **Leora Kornfeld, Co-founder of Ubiquity Interactive**, sees a cell phone more like a remote control for your personal entertainment system. Their system, MetroCode is a cell phone based mobile arts and entertainment service that radically extends the capability of a cell phone. It lets you use your cell to browse and activate your surroundings. Users dialing into their system can access a combination of professionally produced and user-created content ranging from audio and photos to text and multimedia messages.

The system launched in May 2006 with the **Vancouver Sculpture Biennale**, a public art festival featuring sculptures displayed in public places through April 2007. Viewers were invited to call a central phone number and enter a specific code for one of the 22 public pieces they were viewing. The feature enables a mobile-guided art exhibit with the additional capabilities to leave and retrieve text messages, photos and videos on site and comments about the art. It has made art public, participatory and interactive. The system has tracked approximately 1,000 calls/month. This project was part of an industry-driven research initiative called **Mobile MUSE** (Media-rich Urban Shared Experience). The long-term vision is to develop **MetroCode** as a tourist product for the entire city by 2010.

For marketers, the possible commercial applications for this technology are intriguing. Last fall the **Vancouver International Film Festival** launched Mobile VIFF through **ACM Media**, as an experimental mobile interactive tool designed to give film audiences access to Festival information through their hand-held devices such as cell phones, Blackberries, PDA's and iPods. "We are getting feedback from VIFF members right now. What we do know is that attitudes and understanding of mobile technology in Vancouver is behind Europe and Asia, but the initiative was generally well received," notes Keith Lay, President and Creative Director, ACM Media.

Vancouver Opera is now using mobile technology as a marketing tool for Tosca. A dial up audio campaign is being promoted on transit buses, transit shelters, and posters. There are 9 audio vignettes narrated by **CBC's Gloria Macarenko**, followed by music samplers and an invitation to buy tickets. "The singing posters offer a gateway into the thrill and intrigue of Tosca," says **Doug Tuck, Director of Audience Development and Community Programs at Vancouver Opera**. "This project is helping us imagine new ways to communicate with our audience of today and tomorrow in a dramatic and fun way." Many people think they need a knowledge base to access opera. That's why this application is so interesting. It makes a poster a less static thing and offers a way in.

Industry leaders see mobile media as a 'third screen'. "People have a personal and emotional connection with mobile media, more so than their desktop computer. They use it to access and share information. This makes the possibilities for marketing fascinating," says Kornfeld.

"Mobile media is poised for an expansion, similar to the explosion that the internet had ten years ago, but it is hampered by user fees. Most people, most of the time, think about how much stuff costs before they try it on their cell phone. The "pay per" model that the phone companies use is profitable, but unfriendly to both innovation and user," notes **Richard Smith, Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University School of Communication**.

In a world of mass advertising and increasingly cluttered message spaces, anything that offers customer engagement and one to one communication is very savvy. And in the future, content will be "pushed" and linked to online applications. Mobile media can increase the level of interest and engagement at the moment of contact. Rather than seeing an ad and acting later or forgetting to act at all, mobile media can capture an actionable moment. And for marketers that can make the cash register sing.

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