



25 November 2003

A RAINIER PR WHITE PAPER Bluejacking as a Marketing Channel

Bluetooth offers a new communications channel to marketers. But the technology needs to be respected if they are to avoid alienating consumers according to a white paper from Rainier PR. Stephen Waddington, managing director of Rainier PR, turns wireless sleuth.

The marketing industry is never slow to jump on a new communication channel and exploit it for its own ends. The telephone, email, SMS text messaging and the web have all become a standard part of the marketing toolkit, the latter having a marked impact on the way in which organisations communicate with their audiences.

Now there is a new mobile communication platform called Bluetooth and both the marketing and technology community are debating whether it offers a new opportunity to be exploited for marketing gain.

Accidental Communication Application

Bluetooth is a wireless cable replacement technology incorporated into mobile devices such as phones, PDAs and laptop computers, enabling data to be transferred between them without wires. It has been promoted as an open standard by the Bluetooth Specialist Interest Group (SIG) founded by technology heavyweights including Agere, Ericsson, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Motorola, Nokia and Toshiba.

Bluetooth was never intended as a messaging platform. But then in December 2002, Adrian Chiang from Singapore posted a message on Esato, a Sony Ericsson web site for consumers, detailing how he had discovered that it was possible to send a message from his phone to another person in close range via Bluetooth.

Chiang coined the phrase Bluejacking to describe this new communication phenomenon. But the phrase itself could kill the new communication mechanism before it even gets off the ground according to Mike Short, UK chairman of the Mobile Data Association. "Bluejacking is an unfortunate name. It implies an aggressive and illicit activity," said Short.

By contrast, manufacturers such as TDK whose products incorporate Bluetooth are promoting Bluejacking as a way of raising the profile of Bluetooth.

How to Bluejack

1. Find a busy place where lots of mobile phones might be, such as shopping centres, trains, bars or cinemas
2. Create a new entry in your phone's address book like 'Hi you've been bluejacked'. Attach a picture if you want to.
3. Search the area for other Bluetooth phones to contact and choose one
4. Send your message. They then receive the message, 'Hi you've been bluejacked'
5. Keep a look out for when your 'victim' gets the message and the puzzled look on their face

Source: TagText

Millions of Mobile Devices

The emergence over the summer of 2003 of Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones from numerous manufacturers including Motorola, Nokia and Sony Ericsson has given rise to the novel communication channel.

There is another challenge to the adoption of Bluetooth. Mobile devices are typically sold with Bluetooth disabled and only as the profile of the technology is raised in the consumer media will consumers start to enable Bluetooth features.

According to Forrester Research 20 per cent of new mobile phones are expected to incorporate Bluetooth by 2004, increasing to 75 per cent by 2008.

Marketing Opportunity

This mechanism by which messages can be sent between Bluetooth devices - predominantly mobile phones - has provoked discussion within the marketing community as to whether Bluetooth could be used as a promotional communication channel.

Bluejacking offers three distinct opportunities for marketers:

1. **Viral communication**
Exploiting communication between consumers to share content such as text, images and Internet references in the same way that brands such as Budweiser, Honda, Trojan Condoms and even John West Salmon, have created multimedia content that has very quickly been circulated around the Internet

2. Community activities

Dating or gaming events could be facilitated using Bluetooth as a channel to communicate between participants. The anonymous nature of bluejacking makes it a superb physiological tool for communication between individuals in a localised environment such as a café or pub

3. Location based services

Bluejacking could be used to send electronic coupons or promotional messages to consumers as they pass a high street shop or supermarket. To date SMS text messaging has been used with mixed success as a mechanism to send consumers location based information

Rainier PR believes that viral communication and to a lesser extent event based activities offer the greatest opportunity for bluejacking as a marketing mechanism. Already companies are looking at ways of exploiting the technology in these two areas.

London, UK-based TagText has made available a series of urban avatars available free for consumers to send each other. The company is tight lipped about its ultimate product and goals but has done a superb job of raising its profile by making available a series of free media properties.

What is clear is that TagText wants consumers to send TagText characters to each other and raise the profile of the company. Herein lies one of the key benefits of Bluetooth. Unlike any other mobile communication mechanism it is absolutely free – there are no subscription charges and no costs associated with sending a message.

“The rise in text-based bluejacking couldn’t have been more timely for TagText’s launch. Not only can we capitalise on the trend, but using images adds a new dimension that even most bluejackers haven’t yet considered,” said Russell Buckley, director and founder of TagText.

Buckley admits that Bluejacking would not suit everyone, but for brands that want bleeding edge youth credibility, it’s certainly worth considering. “If you don’t shy away from other forms of guerrilla marketing like fly posting or giant image projection, you may want to think about this new medium,” he said.

Game Play

Bluetooth can be used to send messages distances of up to approximately 10 metres (33 feet) making event-based activities possible. This provides a platform for community based activities. Already games publishers such as Cellsoft and Lavastorm Engineering have ported multiplayer games to Bluetooth-enabled devices. Dating concepts are sure to follow.

Analysts have been quick to dismiss bluejacking as a fad, pointing to in-car communication as the key Bluetooth driver. They may be correct. Alternatively, bluejacking could mirror the unforeseen growth of SMS text messaging. Like Bluejacking, text messaging was never intended for consumer use. Instead it was developed as a mechanism to enable telecom engineers to report faults.

Location Based Marketing

Location-based services are the most interesting, yet controversial application of bluejacking. A supermarket could send Bluetooth promotional messages to customers as they approached a particular aisle. In the High Street or shopping centre individual shops could send electronic coupons to consumers as they walked passed a shop.

But the main challenge for the marketing community in exploiting Bluetooth for commercial promotion on a business-to-consumer basis is questionable. The use of Bluetooth for consumer-to-consumer based activities is perfectly legal. By contrast the legal position regarding business-to-consumer promotion is less clear.

The legal community is yet to decide whether this kind of bluejacking falls within the confines of the Data Protection Act 1998 or the European Union Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations due to come into force on 11 December, 2003.

With SMS and email marketing the new Regulations will make it clear that, subject to only a few narrow exceptions, marketers need to require users to opt in to receiving marketing communications. But does this apply to Bluetooth?

"From a legal perspective, it certainly looks arguable that using Bluetooth for unsolicited marketing would fall outside the new Regulations. The legislation is drafted to deal with communications over networks, but Bluetooth relies on short range radio signals rather than any communications network. So this could be a loop-hole, although of course in practice there will often be good reasons for getting opt-in consent in any event," said Nick Johnson, partner with the law firm Osborne Clarke.

In or Out?

Opt-in schemes can clearly be made to work as the plethora of loyalty cards such as Nectar in the UK show. Although this requirement clearly restricts the opportunity for the marketing community, it is essential to avoid alienating consumers.

"There are the practical implications of how consumers might react to having a message beamed at them - some are likely to march into the outlet and express their views in clear and forthright terms," said Mike Grenville, founder of 160characters, the SMS and mobile messaging association.

Spam is universally detested. Given the intimate relationship between a consumer and their mobile phone, the opportunity for a company to alienate a consumer with a misdirected Bluetooth message is likely to be even greater.

The world does not need Bluespam. The danger is that if the marketing community abuses Bluetooth for commercial gain, users will simply disable the feature on their phones.

Ben Scott-Robinson, creative director at mobile marketing firm Unstatic sounds a cautionary note, "You really need to understand what you're doing with this new medium. There's a fine line between a clever campaign and damaging your brand. Take time to understand it before jumping on the bandwagon," said Scott-Robinson.

Further Information

160characters
www.160characters.org

Bluetooth Special Interest Group (SIG)
www.bluetooth.com

Mobile Data Association
www.mda-mobiledata.org

Mobile Marketing Association
www.mmaglobal.co.uk

Osborne Clarke
www.osborneclarke.com

Sony Ericsson
www.esato.com

Tagtext
www.tagtext.com

Unstatic
www.unstatic.co.uk

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