



Text-Based Mobile Recruiting: The New Frontier for Job Sourcing

An Industry Examination

January 2011



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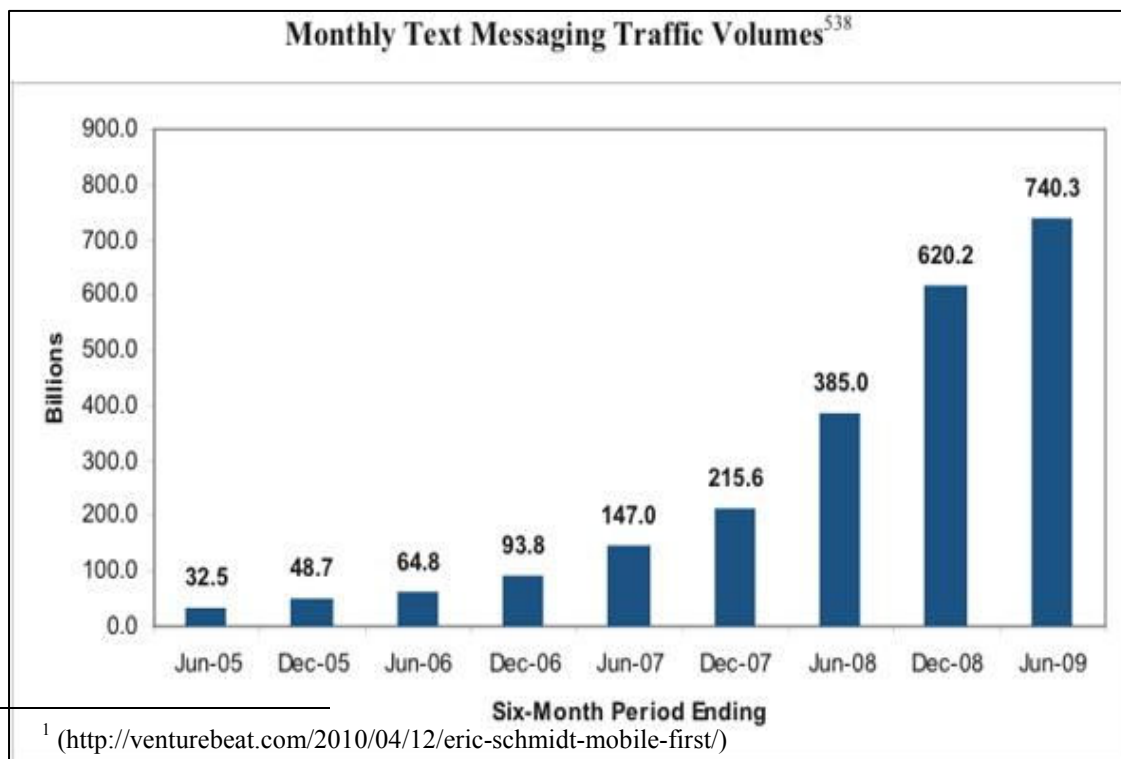
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Executive Overview

Over the last decade, mobile phone usage has exploded worldwide. As individuals have shifted their time and attention to the mobile phone -- and in turn spending over 7.5 hours per day -- employers and recruiters, in particular, have reexamined how they engage and reach candidates. As Google's CEO, Eric Schmidt, recently observed:

*"Mobile will ultimately be the way you provision most of your services. The way I like to put it is, the answer should always be mobile first. You should always put your best team and your best app on your mobile app."*¹

Indeed, as one indicator of how dramatically candidate behavior has changed, job seekers have gone from sending fewer than 2 SMS "text messages" per day in 2005 to sending over 40 "texts" per day in 2010 – a twenty-fold increase. During this same time, candidate response rates to email, phone, and traditional mail inquiries have continued to decline. This paper examines the best practices of recruiting candidates "smarter, faster, and cheaper" using the mobile phone.



Benefits & Pitfalls of Mobile Recruiting

In its simplest form, recruiting boils down to attracting, screening, and selecting the right candidate for a specific job. The specific methods that organizations use to recruit candidates, however, are quite varied:

- Job boards and job search engines
- Company career sites
- Contingent recruiters
- Newspaper ads
- Employee referral programs
- Staffing firms
- Social media

The list goes on and on. In recent years, a new technique has been added: **mobile recruiting**. What exactly is meant by this - and more importantly, what are the advantages and disadvantages of mobile recruiting versus other methods?

What exactly *is* mobile recruiting?

"To engage in finding and attracting employees, new members, etc through the medium of Mobile devices..."²

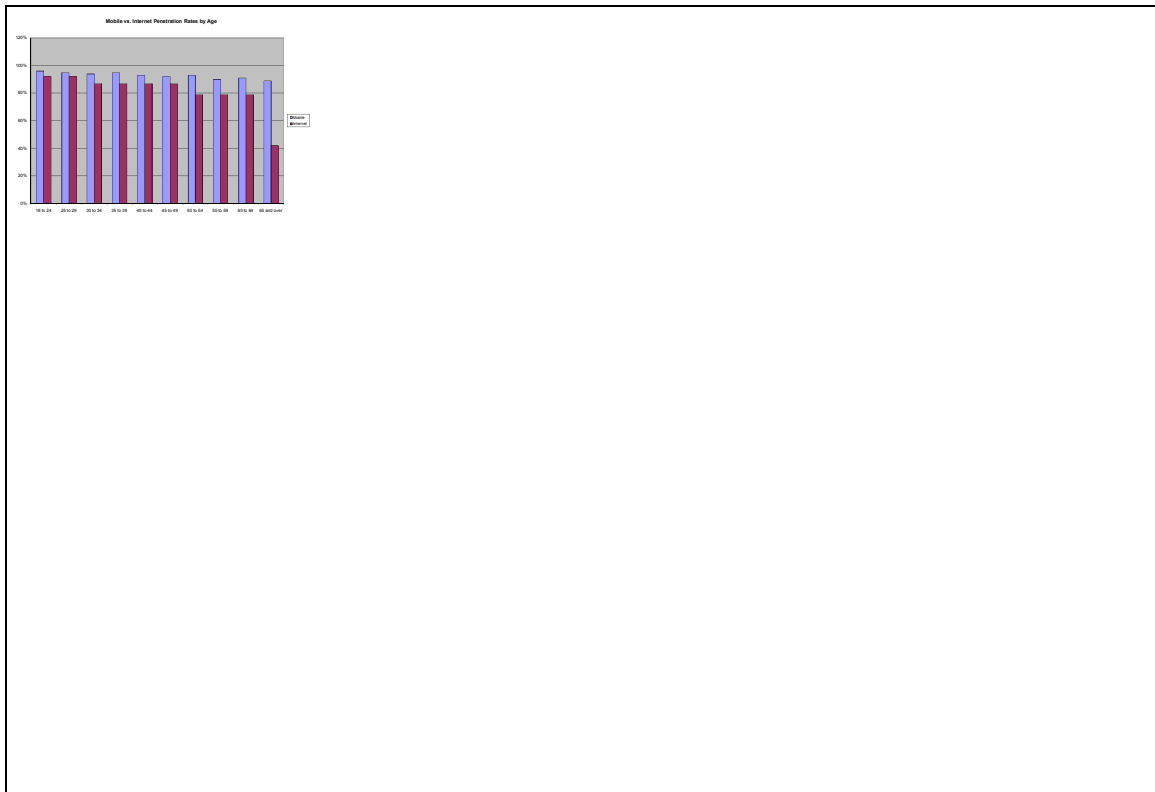
Mobile recruiting relies on a specific channel – the mobile phone – to reach and interact with candidates. But why would an organization choose to add mobile to its recruiting arsenal?³

- Mobile is **pervasive** – over **91% of the U.S. population are mobile subscribers**⁴

² <http://www.recruitingblogs.com/profiles/blogs/mobile-recruiting-mohbee1>

³ <http://www.businessinsider.com/25-charts-on-the-state-of-the-wireless-industry-2010-5#18-to-24-has-highest-wireless-penetration-by-age-group-22>

- Mobile is **'always on' and affordable** – users carry their phones almost all the time – over 70% of the US handset market is comprised of low-end (~\$50) 'feature phones', making mobile ubiquitous
- Mobile **connects to candidates** that aren't 'reachable via other channels' – such as those without Internet-enabled computers



Let's take a closer look at the world of mobile.

⁴ <http://arstechnica.com/telecom/news/2010/03/wireless-survey-91-of-americans-have-cell-phones.ars>

A World Gone Mobile

The story of mobile's growth is inextricably tied with the growth of Internet usage – and the gap between **those with computers, and those without**. A 2009 study by the Pew Foundation's Internet and American Life Project found that 85% of households with an income exceeding \$75,000 have broadband service; more than double the 42% of households earning less than \$30,000 that have Internet service. In addition, 79% of those living in households earning \$75,000 or more own desktop computers, compared with 55% of those living in less well-off homes.⁵ How can recruiters reach the “middle majority” of workers who aren't connected to the Internet but are unemployed?

Answers may lie in ‘last mile’ services like text message mobile recruiting that meet candidates on their turf, and on their own terms. Over the past ten years in the US -- and even more so abroad – there has been an **explosion in SMS text message usage** – 72% of adults and 87% of teens use text messaging over 30 times each day.⁶ The demographic groups with the highest growth inside of this usage are Hispanics, African-Americans, and young adults.⁷ It appears that the ‘Digital Divide’ between those with and without access to computers may be bridged by mobile devices.⁸

So - how does the growth in mobile pervasiveness and usage tie into candidate recruiting? We will now examine some of the challenges faced by many organizations in keeping their talent pipelines full of the best quality talent.

⁵ <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Better-off-households.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Cell-Phones-and-American-Adults.aspx>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/technology/02drill.html?_r=1

Engaging the Best Candidates

Identifying and reaching the right candidates has always been a challenge for hiring managers and recruiters. The advent of job boards such as Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com allow mass 'broadcasting' of job advertisements to anyone with an Internet connection; in turn, these ads produced record numbers of job applicants. Over time, though, analysts noticed differences in response that seemed to be related to specific industries – and socioeconomic standing. In other words, certain industries (such as retail and manufacturing) employed the types of workers that tended to lack computer access – and thus their response to job ads was depressed when compared to response rates of applicants in other industries.

The pervasiveness of mobile phones provides recruiters with an opportunity to reach groups of candidates that **may be underrepresented** when using traditional Internet-based tools such as job boards and company career sites. From the perspective of EEO/OFCCP compliance, mobile allows for new levels of candidate engagement that can inform diversity initiatives – in particular, for enterprise and government employers. In many ways, opening a mobile channel is becoming a "best practice" in the staffing industry, where inclusion and equal opportunity are critical at each level of the recruitment lifecycle.

The Mobile Platform

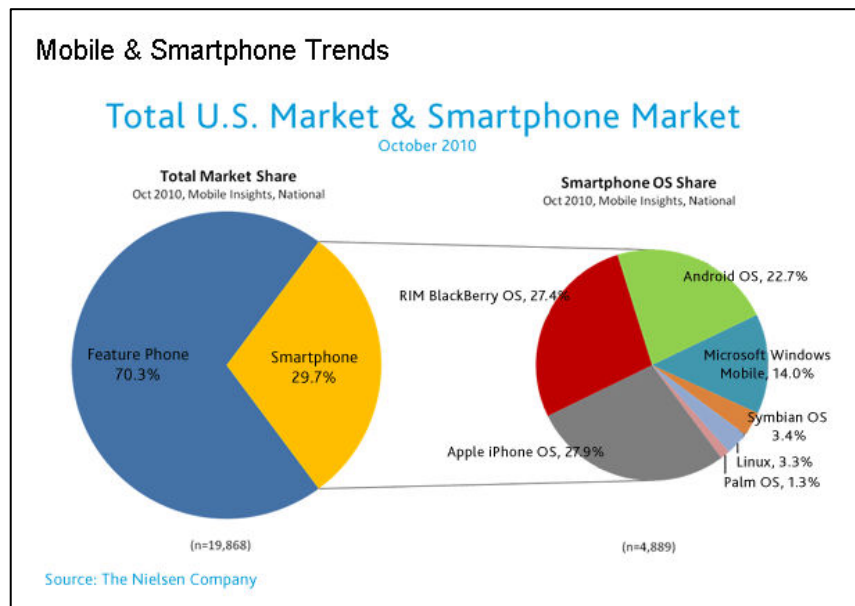
Recruiters can communicate with candidates via mobile devices across the recruitment lifecycle, and through several channels:

- By text message (SMS) – 90%+ of US workers 'text' everyday
- By MMS (multimedia messaging services) - although this channel has relatively low adoption rates

- By web over mobile – reaching just 15% of high-end workforce

Text messaging, most notably, is ubiquitous, working across both the standard ‘feature’ phones and the newer generation of ‘smartphones’. At present, feature phones comprise over 70% of the installed mobile base (~220 million subscribers in the US alone!).

Given the diffusion of mobile phones, recruiters are faced with an interesting choice: whether to **focus on feature phone services (SMS)**, or to **focus on web-enabled “smartphones”**?



This is, of course, not necessarily an either-or decision, as some organizations have sufficient resources to engage using both channels. However, apart from cost and time considerations, recruiters must determine which technique is **most likely** to reach the right candidates – and produce a meaningful response.

Advantages of Text Messaging for Recruiting

Research suggests that text messaging may be the best choice for many organizations, and for several reasons:

1. **Reach.** As noted above, 91% of the U.S. population subscribes to a mobile service – and text messaging can reach **the majority of these users**. Web-enabled solutions can at best reach 30% of this audience.
2. **Responsiveness.** Text messages have significant advantages for recruiters over traditional email: Research indicates that 95% of text messages are **opened and read**, versus 11% of emails⁹; Data also indicate that most text messages are read **within 4 minutes of receipt**, versus 48 hours for email.¹⁰
3. **Demographics.** Text messages can reach a **broader demographic** than computer-based techniques, simply because mobile is pervasive. In fact, 79% of blacks and 83% of Hispanics use mobile devices for text messaging, versus 68% of whites.¹¹ For organizations that are actively pursuing diversity goals, text messaging can help.

Disadvantages of Text Messaging

As with any recruiting tool, text messaging also has disadvantages that hiring managers must weigh:

⁹ <http://www.motomessage.com/text-message-marketing-email-marketing/>

¹⁰ <http://www.whammobile.com/sms-marketing/why-mobile-marketing/mobile-marketing-statistics-and-facts/>

¹¹ <http://www.qwasi.com/news/tag/text-message-statistics>

1. **Limited user plans:** Not all candidates have unlimited text messaging plans, and thus are charged for texts they receive.
2. **Limited length:** By their nature, most text messages are limited to 160 characters or less, and may not provide enough description to motivate some candidates to respond.
3. **Impersonal.** As with email and online listings, text messages are impersonal, which may limit responses in some cases.

No recruiting channel is without limitations, so recruiters and HR professionals must weight these disadvantages with the advantages listed earlier.¹²

Nuts and Bolts: How Organizations Are Using Text Messaging



“Job seekers have gone from sending fewer than two SMS ‘text messages’ per day in 2005 to sending over 40 ‘texts’ per day in 2010”

If, as indicated above, text messaging is an effective way to reach potential candidates, how are organizations using this tool?

Let’s take a look:

- **Job Advertising:** Candidates respond to an online, print or radio ad, send a text, and receive job information from the company; or job ads are texted to candidates, who can view the job listing and even respond – all via their

¹² <http://www.instanttechnology.com/newsf.aspx?id=46>

phone.¹³ Many organizations, such as SODEXO and AT&T, use texting to drive recruitment traffic to their website.^{14 15}

- **Candidate screening:** Text messages can be used to 'pre-qualify' job applicants by pointing them to position-specific questions on the company's career site. This can in turn help reduce the total number of applicants a hiring manager must review and increase the quality of the applicant pool. Some mobile recruiting services also allow applicant screening directly on the mobile device itself.
- **Employer branding:** Informational ads about the employer, including upcoming events, pointers to career site articles, job fairs, and so on help build the 'employer brand' in the candidate's mind.
- **Reaching active candidates:** Recruiters can text to candidates who are actively engaged in the interview and application process with updates, scheduling information, and other useful prompts.
- **Engaging passive candidates:** More importantly, text message campaigns can privately, quickly access passive candidates who "keep a finger on the pulse of the labor market" through real-time SMS updates of local job opportunities.

In all of these areas of implementation, text messaging is an attractive technique because it **increases overall response, widens the demographic reach** of these efforts, and **shortens time-to-hire**. The high responsiveness of candidates to text messages, relative low cost, and the fact that almost all of the

¹³ <http://call-center-software.tmcnet.com/topics/call-center-services/articles/70220-convergys-using-innovative-recruiting-techniques-the-philippines.htm>

¹⁴ <http://www.workforce.com/archive/feature/software-technology/hr-technology-go-go-vendors-dialing-up-mobile-versions-of/index.php?ht=>

¹⁵ <http://www.ere.net/2010/04/05/best-practices-in-recruiting-ere-excellence-awards-2010-part-3-of-4/>

candidate population can be reached via mobile phone have driven many HR and recruiting professionals to embrace texting in their overall recruiting plans.^{16, 17, 18}

The Future

What does the future hold for text-based mobile recruiting? Current usage suggests several possibilities:

- **'Instant' recruiting:** Recruiters use text messages to reach out to targeted subsets of their candidate base for high priority, 'last minute' positions.
- **Diversity hiring initiatives:** Employers use text messaging to increase the size of their minority candidate talent pool – both via job offerings and also employer branding.
- **Deeper integration with all recruiting efforts:** As recruiter use of text messages becomes more sophisticated, cross-channel promotion will increase in traditional media such as ads, job boards, and career fairs.

Text-based mobile recruiting provides recruiters with an effective tool to reach existing candidates – and new candidates who were hitherto 'unreachable.' It seems likely to be 'standard equipment' for competitive enterprises and recruiters during the coming decade.

¹⁶ <http://www.recruitingtrends.com/texting-to-find-your-next-great-candidate>

¹⁷ <http://blog.silkroad.com/index.php/2010/03/text-messaging-in-recruiting/>

¹⁸ <http://blog.collegerecruiter.com/blog/2010/08/28/video-taking-your-recruiting-message-mobile-why-how-and-when/>

Appendix

Information Sources:

- **CloudRecruiting.net** (<http://cloudrecruiting.net/>): blog on recruiting in the cloud, with significant content on mobile recruiting
- **ERE.net** (<http://www.ere.net>): general recruiting site with frequent coverage of mobile recruiting
- **Mobile Marketer** (<http://www.mobilemarketer.com/>): Not recruiting-specific, but lots of useful data
- **Mobile Marketing Association** (<http://mmaglobal.com/main>): Research and resources
- **Mobile Marketing Watch** (<http://www.mobilemarketingwatch.com/>): Not recruiting-specific, but lots of useful data
- **Pew Internet** (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>): Ongoing research about the internet, including coverage of mobile