



strategy + support for  
musicians creating change



Air Traffic Control

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## Recommendations to the Field: Mobile Strategies to Engage New Audiences

### Executive Summary

In May + June of 2009, Air Traffic Control (ATC), a resource for musicians on effective advocacy and philanthropy, and Revolution Messaging, a progressive mobile and lifestyle communications company, teamed up with the band Street Sweeper Social Club (SSSC) to design and implement an experiment that sought to engage audiences in music and activism through mobile technologies.

The results indicate that mobile is an effective way to engage audiences. The chart below reflects some of the metrics we used in this experiment. (Comparisons to other common engagement methods are indicated in the endnotes.)

Action	Results
Joined mobile campaign	Average of almost 4% of the audience every night. <sup>i</sup>
Called band hotline (interactive voice technology)	40.59% of total that joined the mobile campaign.
Listened to music	38.9% of total that called the hotline.
Listened to advocacy message	26% of total that called the hotline.
Called Congress	21% of those that listened to advocacy message. <sup>ii</sup>
Donated \$5	0.3% of total list (2.5 times higher than email). <sup>iii</sup>

While many of the lessons learned from this experiment are specific to activist collaborations with musicians, they can also be useful in many other live event situations with a known messenger acting as a spokesperson rather than a musician, and organizations providing suitable cultural or creative content along side of their advocacy messages. Some of the key lessons that were learned from this experiment include:

- Mobile strategies with artist participation engaged more people to sign up than traditional clipboard /petition signing efforts.
- Mobile data stays organized and does not get lost/misplaced/ stolen.
- Fans engaged in the mobile campaign took action: They called congress, bought CDs, and donated money to charity at statistically significant higher rates of return than other forms of communication (email, flyering, etc).
- Mobile strategies work well when used in conjunction with other communication avenues (press, email, twitter, websites, social media, etc).
- Hotlines (or interactive voice technologies) hold great promise for simultaneous issue education, activation and entertainment.

To help organizers use what we have learned, ATC and Revolution Messaging created this report to document background information on mobile communications and technologies used to design our campaign; the results of our efforts; and the recommendations that emerged from the experiment.

## Background

Our interest in conducting this experiment came from decades of study and experience in engaging music audiences in advocacy, including fairly conclusive evidence that encouragement from the stage<sup>iv</sup> produced the best results. Recent studies by others with experience in this and other fields furthered our thinking by demonstrating that:

- Mobile presents an incredibly intimate form of communications (a mobile phone is often considered an individual's most personal device), one that friends are using with each other.<sup>v</sup>
- A personal connection with a celebrity can have an immense impact on why someone would both learn about an issue and take action on that issue.<sup>vi</sup>
- Open rates on SMS (short message service / text) messages are approximately 90%<sup>vii</sup>, whereas email is 16% and declining y/y.<sup>viii</sup>
- Mobile technologies are closing the “digital divide”, thus enabling artists and organizers to reach new audiences.<sup>ix</sup>

There are other clear advantages to using mobile technology: contact information gathered via mobile is higher in quality (because the contact data is automatically transferred, thus no human error in entering info from a paper sign-up sheet) and longevity (due to individuals being locked into long term contracts on phones as well as recent changes in portability of cell numbers from one carrier to another). Because of these factors, we deduced that mobile could become an incredible tool to achieve intimate engagement around an issue with new audiences that would result in effective advocacy.

### Our experiment and results

During all of the SSSC shows in May and June 2009, one of the two front men for SSSC, either Tom Morello or Boots Riley, would entertainingly inform the audience that they weren't just a band--they were a social club--and then encourage the audience to join the social club by texting “street” to 94553. Often, a graphic (see sidebar) was displayed on the venue's large screens for the duration of the last song and the set change (a total of approximately 20 minutes) to reinforce the artists' words and the campaign's short code.<sup>x</sup>

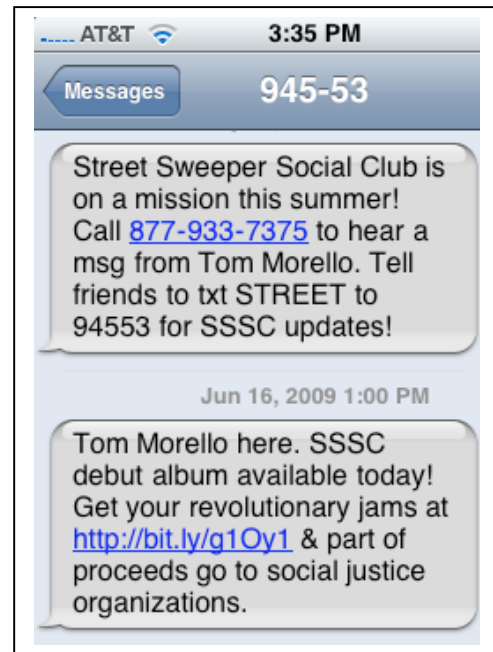


The content of the announcement varied from night to night as we experimented with ways to maximize audience response numbers. We found that longer stage announcements (over 1 minute in length with repeated mentions of the short code), a contest to win a chance to come back stage to meet Tom and Boots, and the presence of the electronic signage described above were all critical factors in achieving higher rates of response. Ultimately, over 90% of the total list was generated by these activities.

An incredibly valuable aspect of the mobile campaign was that it is transportable—the same campaign and codes can be used in announcements from the stage as well as in press, websites, social media, email, etc. In this experiment, 11.68% of the list was built from non-show activities such as these. We would advise other artists and organizers to experiment more with using mobile to build lists through the press, and particularly radio interviews where listeners are more likely to have their phones with them than their computers. For example, here is how Tom explained the campaign in one print interview:

*"[The band is] a social club and you can join it if you text the word 'street' to 94553. The guy who ran Obama's texting campaign is running this campaign for us. We give people free Street Sweeper music. We help them plug into local homeless-advocacy organizations and food banks in the area where they live. Every once in a while, Boots Riley just calls people up at random to invite them to a show or invite them backstage. You'll never know what happens. It's a way to directly communicate the music and the activism of the band without any middle person--or even a computer. Just go straight to your phone."*

After fans heard the announcement and joined the mobile network, we devised several music and activism-related actions for them to engage in. Each engagement was intended to test how much a music fan would do to participate based on the amount of time it took to do the action. As we expected, the numbers decreased the more we asked fans to do.



One of the most successful parts of the campaign was a toll-free number or hotline where fans could hear messages left by the band, listen to songs, and take action. The content that was put into the hotline included:

- A welcome message from Tom.
- Boots telling the story behind the song "100 Little Curses".
- The entire song "100 Little Curses".
- A message from Tom asking fans to volunteer at homeless shelters in their community, and the ability to press 1 to be connected to a volunteer hotline.
- A message from Tom connecting poverty to our broken system of health care in America, and asking fans to press 1 to be connected to their member of Congress to demand a new system.

Not surprisingly we found that shorter, passionate hotline messages with easy calls-to-action, like the health care message, worked best. We determined that we need to prioritize strategic messaging and length of the recordings, and we need to explore re-cutting the recordings for P.S.A.'s and other uses.

## Conclusion

While mobile campaign set-up costs are expensive, the open and engagement rates of return indicated in the executive summary (and especially when compared with

traditional methods as indicated in the endnotes) are worth the investment. Please note that we do not suggest that mobile replace other forms of communication (e.g.: email, in-person, radio, social network). Indeed, this experiment found it worked best *in conjunction with* many of these communication forms and outlets.

We are incredibly excited by the potential of mobile in the realm of music and activism, particularly as others refine these strategies in their work. Below are a set of recommendations that we've developed from this experiment and experience. We encourage anyone employing mobile technologies to engage audiences, particularly music audiences, to send us their "lessons learned" so that these strategies can be added to our knowledge-base, continue to mature, and, most importantly, be shared with others.

Recommendations for employing mobile technologies:

- Whether you are an artist or an organizer, list building is essential to having a relationship with your audience. Here are some best practices we have gathered from the experiment:
  - The individual delivering the mobile campaign announcements should be known to the audience (see more about this below). In our case, it was the two main musicians in the band. The messenger and others should talk about the campaign at every opportunity, not just onstage.
  - Stage announcements are a vital way to build your list and engage fans. In our experiment close to 90% of our list came from these efforts. We found that the announcements are best received when they are approximately a minute in length (repeat the short code to audience a minimum of three times), entertaining in content/delivery, and reinforced with signage that displays the short code. This may feel uncomfortable to do at first, but we found that after a few tries artists can often find a manner that works well for themselves and their audiences.
  - A contest (like meeting the messenger in person or on the phone) significantly increased the number of sign-ups per night. It also didn't seem to lead to opt-outs when the fans realized they didn't win.
  - Other ways to build a list that aren't part of events are also successful.
    - Place a widget to collect mobile sign-ups on your websites and social network pages. When a fan enters their number into the widget, the technology automatically adds them to the mobile network. (A mobile vendor will be able to provide you with the code to put into your website for this.)
    - Mention the mobile campaign and short code in interviews, particularly radio interviews. This can engage people who wouldn't otherwise have found out about your work.
    - Tweet the campaign, short code and any new interactive voice/hotline recordings (with the hotline number). Do so repeatedly, and ask that others retweet so it may grow virally.<sup>xi</sup> In our experiment, most of the list-building outside of the concert events happened via twitter.
- Send out only relevant text messages, blend the music (or other creative content) and the activism, and be careful not to over message. Too frequent, duplicate or irrelevant texts will lead to opt-outs, although we were surprised at how few! Also,

be sure to send texts at appropriate hours – no one wants to be woken up in the middle of the night with a text.

- Plan your mobile actions strategically. Calls-to-action, whether via text or interactive voice, should be short and easy to complete, and appropriate for the audience and the level of commitment being asked of them. Our experiment found that the more time the action requires, the less likely the fan is to do it. Also, phone-based advocacy (see footnote for examples) are best. <sup>xii</sup>
- Set up an interactive voice system (IVR) like a band (or organization) hotline. Our experiment found this to be one of the most exciting areas of mobile communication because it provided a blend of music and activism content, in the musicians' own words, and immediate phone-based actions. Here are some recommendations on how to do interactive voice well:
  - Be creative (see Revolution Messaging's example of [governor gone missing hotline](#) <sup>xiii</sup> for an entertaining political example), and tell your fans about the hotline and new recordings often via all of your other communications avenues.
  - Shorter, passionate hotline messages with easy calls-to-action (i.e.: "Click-to-call Congress") perform well.
  - Be strategic with the messaging and length of these recordings, and also explore re-cutting them for PSAs and other uses by organizers to carry the message further. (We found that under 60 seconds is probably best.)
  - Integrating content that is both activist in theme and entertaining is a win-win situation for everyone: the fans love it, the musicians build deeper relationships with the fans (which is good for their business and ability to convene lots of people for a cause), and effective activism can get done.
- Watch your numbers and see what works and doesn't: response rates are quick and measurable. The key to a successful mobile campaign will be tracking numbers often and analyzing what is working to achieve your goals. (A mobile vendor can teach you how to access and read the data.)

Specific advice for Organizations using mobile:

- Recruiting to a mobile campaign is most productive when a recognizable spokesperson is making a direct appeal to the audience. Organizations should be mindful of this and make an extended, direct appeal for sign-ups at public rallies and other events via spokespeople (with reinforcing signage). Also, be prepared to spend time with the spokesperson to help them find a way to make these announcements comfortably. They will be much more compelling if they are comfortable with the message. Use a spokesperson that knows your audience well/relevant to your audience as they will be better able to engage the crowd.
- Contests that offer a reward for sign-ups are an effective recruiting tactic. A contest that is tied to the organization's goal is less likely to lead to a spike in opt-outs at a later date.
- Text messaging represents a promising way to make fundraising appeals to people who have never contributed. Start with a low amount of money, and one-click technology that makes it easy. Thank them for their donation, and then transition them to other communications channels for future, higher dollar asks.

- If working with a musician at concerts, we found that single-act shows performed better (around 20% of the audience texting in) than festival shows (where many musicians were performing).

More resources on engaging concertgoers, mobile and music:

Air Traffic Control's website: [www.atctower.net](http://www.atctower.net)

Revolution Messaging's website: [www.revolutionmessaging.com](http://www.revolutionmessaging.com)

- ATC's Better Practices, Engaging Concertgoers in Social Change" available [online](#).<sup>xiv</sup>
- "Celebrity Endorsements and their potential to Motivate Young Voters" *Mass Communications and Society* 11: 420-436.
- Pew Internet and American Life Project: <http://www.pewinternet.org/>
- Pew Internet and American Life Report: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/12-Wireless-Internet-Use.aspx>
- "Mobilizing the Mobiles: How Text Messaging Can Boost Youth Voter Turnout ", New Voters Project, \_007. Available online at: <http://www.newvotersproject.org/research/text-messaging>
- More on mobile fundraising: <http://www.mobilecommons.com/blog/2009/03/integrating-text-messaging-during-year-end-fundraising-more-dough/>
- NTN report: 2009 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study: An Analysis of Online Messaging, Fundraising and Advocacy Metrics for Nonprofit Organizations. Available online at: <http://e-benchmarksstudy.com/2009.html>
- "Online Tactics + Success: An Examination of the Obama for America New Media Campaign" available online at [http://www.brainerd.org/downloads/Online\\_Tactics\\_and\\_Success.pdf](http://www.brainerd.org/downloads/Online_Tactics_and_Success.pdf)

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### **The Team**

Erin Potts is the Executive Director of Air Traffic Control ([www.atctower.net](http://www.atctower.net)). In her early twenties, Erin created the Tibetan Freedom Concerts with the Beastie Boys. Described as the "Best Festival in the World", the concerts produced international awareness, while mobilizing hundreds of popular musicians, raising over \$5 million, and turning tens of thousands of young people into activists for Tibet. Erin's almost two decades of work with culture makers has melded music and activism into increasingly compelling, creative, and effective engagement strategies.

About Scott Goodstein (Revolution Messaging): Goodstein is founder of Revolution Messaging ([www.revolutionmessaging.com](http://www.revolutionmessaging.com)), and was External Online Director for Obama for America, and developed the campaign's social networking platforms. His pioneering work included running the first political campaign to launch niche based social networks like BlackPlanet, Eons, MiGente, AsianAve, Disaboom, etc. He built the campaign's lifestyle marketing strategy and developed the "street team" materials used

in battleground states. Goodstein also created and implemented Obama Mobile, an advanced communication strategy that included text messaging, downloads, interactive voice response communication, a mobile web site (WAP), and even an iPhone application. Prior to his work for Obama, Goodstein worked for the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and has managed over a dozen political campaigns. Goodstein loves mixing music, culture and politics. He was the co-founder of Punkvoter.com and Rock Against Bush efforts in 2004.

About Street Sweeper: Tom Morello and Boots Riley have joined forces to form the new musical group, Street Sweeper Social Club ([www.streetsweepersocialclub.com](http://www.streetsweepersocialclub.com)), which Wikipedia describes as “an American rap rock supergroup.” Tom Morello is a founding member and guitarist of the rock bands Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave. The two bands are responsible for multiple Grammy Awards and a combined 30 million albums sold worldwide. Widely celebrated for his unique voice as a master electric guitarist, he is recognized by Rolling Stone Magazine as one of the “100 Greatest Guitar Players of All-Time (#26)”, and is also one of the two guitarists featured as a playable animated character in the overwhelmingly popular Activision video game *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*. Tom Morello graduated from Harvard University with honors as a Political Science major and has been a widely recognized political activist throughout his career.

Boots Riley is best known as the leader of The Coup, the seminal Hip-Hop group from Oakland, CA. As a producer and lyricist, Riley has crafted critically acclaimed albums for The Coup that have graced the year-end Top 10 lists of Rolling Stone, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and more. Born in Chicago and raised in East Oakland’s Funktown neighborhood, Boots became a teenage community organizer. From his history of student organizing in Oakland’s public schools, serving on the committee for the Progressive Labor Party, being the President of Youth InCar (Youth International Committee Against Racism), organizing to build California’s Anti-Racist Farm Workers’ Union, to developing “guerrilla hip hop concerts” (mobile concerts on flatbed trucks), Boots Riley has been an integral part of the progressive struggle for radical change through culture.

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Air Traffic Control (ATC) exists to help musicians play an effective, unique and vital role in the promotion of social justice. Musicians and managers established ATC five years ago to assemble an experienced and trusted team of leaders, resources and tools that would help them to create more effective social change collaborations with each other and with social justice organizations. As a result, ATC became an artists’ air traffic control—one that develops capacity, efficiency, and coordination to produce stronger and more creative social change partnerships. For more information, please go to [www.atctower.net](http://www.atctower.net).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> The actual range of sign ups varied greatly--from 1-20% per night. The lower percentages were at concerts where the band was the opening act. The higher percentage was when the band was headlining. The sign up numbers through our artist-driven mobile campaign were 6.5 times higher than the numbers of people engaged through tabling (without mention from the stage) at the same concerts.

<sup>ii</sup> Interestingly, we ran a similar “Call Congress” campaign on the same subject (health care) as this campaign. We had over a dozen musicians from various genres and levels post a short message on the subject to their websites and encourage people to call congress. The mobile campaign was able to deliver almost 10 times the number of calls as when a dozen bands posted the message on their websites.

<sup>iii</sup> The average response rate for email fundraising in 2008 was 0.12% according to MandR Strategic Services & the Nonprofit Technology Network (2009). *2009 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study*. Washington, DC

<sup>iv</sup> ATC’s “Better Practices, Engaging Concertgoers in Social Change” available online at <http://atctower.net/atc/tiki-index.php?page=researchandandandreports>

<sup>v</sup> How young people communicate with one another:

Don't Know You, Should You Be Part of My Network?	Just Met Would Like to Connect	Long Ago Friends	Friend With My Friends	Friend I Want to Connect With More	Really Good Friend
Dating Site, Google	Social Networking Site, Friend Request	Social Networking Message, Email	Social Networking Site, Group Connect	Cellphone Network, IM Group	IM, Text Message, Talk on Cell

From “HELLO: Generating Word of Mouth on College Campuses,” by Gary Colen, EVP of Alloy Media + Marketing

<sup>vi</sup> See “Celebrity Endorsements and their potential to Motivate Young Voters” *Mass Communications and Society* 11: 420-436.

<sup>vii</sup> Based on Revolution Messaging’s experience.

<sup>viii</sup> 2009 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study: An Analysis of Online Messaging, Fundraising and Advocacy Metrics for Nonprofit Organizations. Available online at: <http://e-benchmarksstudy.com/2009.html>

<sup>ix</sup> See <http://www.futuremajority.com/node/8317>

<sup>x</sup> A short code is a special telephone number, shorter than full telephone numbers, used to address messages from mobile phones.

<sup>xi</sup> Five people tweeting one message in our campaign reached an additional 200 people via twitter. Use a program like [tweetreach.com](http://tweetreach.com) to follow your stats.

<sup>xii</sup> Other examples of click to call actions that activist-bands and organizers might want to experiment with in the future include:

- Listen to a song, then press 1 to request it at a particular radio station or MTV.
- Listen to a short message from an artist or known messenger about Chevron’s polluting of Ecuador, then press 1 to call the corporation’s HQ to ask them to pay reparations.
- Listen to an appeal on health care reform, then press 1 to be connected to your member of congress.

<sup>xiii</sup> See [http://www.politico.com/blogs/scorecard/0609/DSCC\\_launches\\_antiCrist\\_hotline.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/scorecard/0609/DSCC_launches_antiCrist_hotline.html)

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://atctower.net/atc/tiki-index.php?page=researchandandandreports>