



The **Politics-to-Go Handbook**

A Guide to Using Mobile Technology in Politics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

The Politics-to-Go Handbook: A Guide on Using Mobile Technology in Politics is a departure for the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet. Since its inception, the Institute has produced publications and studies that have focused on the PC as a gateway to the democratizing influence of the Internet.

With this publication, we take online politics out of offices and homes and into the streets. The mobile device, a pocket-sized, always-on, go-anywhere communications tool, has become a powerful medium for accessing social networks, sharing information, mobilizing supporters and disseminating political messages.

If the adaptation of the Internet as a political medium is any indication, mobile technology may have a ways to go before the political world uses it to its best advantage. Nonetheless, the process has already begun, and the next four years will prove a critical time for the political experimentation of mobile technology.

Mobile technology is a new medium for most of us in the United States. After all, it has only been since the rise of shows like American Idol that text messaging – a critical component of mobile politics – has swept the nation on a large scale. Many in the political arena have only begun to experiment with mobile technology, and they may encounter a few bumps in the road.

The Politics-to-Go Handbook attempts to make the process a little easier. This publication presents a first-of-its-kind look into the world of mobile technology for politics. Within these pages, we have anthologized the vision, experiences, analysis, tactics and best practices of some of the most innovative minds in technology and politics. Some of our authors disagree about the best way to incorporate mobile into political strategy. Others offer concrete tips on how to use mobile technology effectively to turn out the vote, raise money and disseminate political messages. Still others point to roadblocks that may occur along the way. Many provide case studies detailing what worked and what didn't in political, corporate and nonprofit mobile campaigns. Combined, they offer a unique look at the future of politics as a mobile, personal, democratizing force.

The Politics-to-Go Handbook is organized according to thematic chapters, beginning with an overview of mobile technology and its audience. Chapter 2 looks at the most widespread use of mobile technology globally – mobilizing large groups of people for political purposes, such as protests and elections. From there, we look at gathering and organizing constituent data through mobile devices, messaging and marketing, fundraising, mobile video, cultivation of supporters, citizen journalism, and privacy and security. We close the book with a look at future roadblocks.

TOP TEN TAKE-AWAYS

1. Mobile technology is an equalizer and an amplifier. According to Oliver Starr in Chapter 1, mobile technology provides immediate access to information and it allows you to transcend time and space, connecting you to people and data from virtually anywhere.
2. Mobile devices exceed the reach of wired devices because they provide context. As Jim Manis notes in Chapter 10, mobile can reflect geographical location, mood, presences, status, surroundings and mindset. Political groups should leverage this context when creating fundraising appeals, urgent updates and event reminders.
3. Text is king. It is the simplest and most ubiquitous mobile application. In Chapter 4, Jim Manis says that if you incorporate only one thing into your political strategy, making it text messaging.
4. In the beginning, target the networkers. Both Brad Fay in Chapter 4 and Dennis Crowley in Chapter 9 say that Influentials – the networkers, joiners and doers – are the key to making your mobile campaign spread. How do you attract these people? By pinpointing their interests, engaging them in your campaign and giving them a definite action to take.
5. Cell phones are the last “personal oasis,” and messages need to be personalized to the interests of the recipient. This means that messages:
 - a. Contain information they want. Do not send mobile messages unless people have opted in to your mobile program. If you employ spam tactics, you will end up isolating your supporters, says Roger Entner in Chapter 9. Make your mobile campaign double opt-in. The Mobile Marketing Association tells you exactly how to do this in Chapter 9. Also, allow people to opt-out of receiving messages at any time and through any medium – text messages, Web site, e-mail or phone call.
 - b. Have an immediate context. Send messages about events that give immediate information (e.g., invite people to an event that evening, send them current news updates or ask them to donate right now).
 - c. Target the individual’s location. According to Adam Guy in Chapter 4, you can use geographically-targeted messages to draw people to your events.
6. Use mobile for short messages. Space is limited. Screens are small. Mobile is best used for quick, can’t-wait and timely messages. When you send information to a mobile device, think in terms of a condensed executive summary.
7. Mobile devices are a “push” technology. Use mobile to push information out to your constituents. According to DP Venkatesh in Chapter 4, mobile is not a pull medium like Web sites, which require people to log on or search to find you.
8. Make it easy. Mobile technology engages people with greater efficiency when it makes life a little easier for them. In the political world, this means making it a one-click process to donate, forward a message, register to vote, sign up to volunteer or receive information about an event, according to Adam Guy in Chapter 4.
9. Build cohesion across mediums. Place information about your mobile campaign on all of your advertisements, from your Web site to direct mail to billboards and posters. As Vicente Rafael and Ben Rigby note separately in Chapter 2, cross-medium messaging is more likely to mobilize your supporters and increase the number of people who sign up for your mobile campaign.
10. Train your supporters. Over the next few years, you may have to educate people about mobile technology in order to best utilize your supporters as “mobile warriors.”
 - a. Teach them how to send and receive text messages. In Chapter 4, Nihal Mehta suggests designing a box on your Web site or WAP that simply tells people how to send, receive and forward messages.
 - b. Show them how to use mobile devices while canvassing or at the polls. In Chapter 3, both Kendra Crowley and Hugh Weber recommend teaching your volunteers how to collect voter data or monitor exit polls on PDAs before sending them into the field.
 - c. Explain how to create effective messages. In Chapter 8, Howard Rheingold warns that it is in your organization’s best interest to train people in effective citizen journalism so that they can capture effective images and descriptions about events on their mobile devices and post them online.

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