

NHS RAISING AWARENESS VIA SMS



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Susan King - Teenage Pregnancy Lead

Proven healthcare benefits

- Info on demand 24 hours a day.
- SMS reaches 90%+ of target audience.
- Operational cost savings of 50 - 60% compared to printed communications
- Improvement in response to support information thanks to relevance and immediacy

“The costs involved in printing and distributing information in traditional printed form can vary widely but a good estimate is that each leaflet costs between £0.10-£0.20 and actual penetration into the target audience is often less than 1%. By comparison SMS messages cost between £0.05-0.08 each and are targeted directly to the mobile phone of the user and so have a penetration into the target audience of 90%+. This simple example shows a saving of between 50-60% in production and distribution of key messages using SMS as a delivery system.”

Phil Colledge - Managing Director 123 Consultants

PROFILE

The Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust (PCT) provides primary healthcare services to people in the centre of Birmingham. This is a monumental task, as while these areas include some prosperous commercial and retail neighbourhoods in the central business district, much of it is home to the poorest, most deprived of the inner-city districts. PCTs are a core part of the UK's government-funded National Health Service (NHS), providing a local interface between the NHS and clinics, healthcare providers and social services in the designated area.

The Heart of Birmingham PCT runs 20 health centres and has contracts with 150 family doctors to provide services from 80 practice premises to around 300,000 people. It also has contracts with dentists, pharmacists and opticians to provide primary health care services and additionally provides family planning and genito-urinary medicine services for the whole city, along with healthcare service at Her Majesty's Prison in Birmingham.

The PCT also hosts several city-wide partnerships, including the Drug Action Team, Sexual Health Services and Birmingham's Public Health Network.

THE SITUATION

The Heart of Birmingham PCT needed to maximise the effectiveness of its budget spend, finding cost effective ways to provide people with healthcare information, and allow them to ask for information. Its mandate is exceptionally broad, and as much as 70% of its client base is from ethnic minorities, sometimes with associated language and cultural issues. The National Health Service needed its PCTs to be able to reach out to people more effectively, and the Heart of Birmingham PCT was in particular need of a better way to provide healthcare information more broadly.

SMS was an obvious choice as it has a number of attributes making it a particularly suitable communications tool for the health care industry. Not only is it one of the cheapest ways to communicate, estimated to cost 95% less than any other form of direct communication, but with the increasing ubiquity of mobile phones, the easy-to-use technology makes it a guaranteed channel to reach more people.

SMS messages are only sent to an individual's cell phone which allows the recipient to access the information discretely – important for some younger people, and those facing social pressure when it comes to issues such as reproductive health, drugs and mental well being. Received messages can be easily saved and stored, making them retrievable for later review. Information can also be easily forwarded to others allowing relevant and useful information to be shared freely.

THE SOLUTION

The UK's National Health Service, in conjunction with the Heart of Birmingham PCT as a pilot site, partnered with 123 Consultants and Clickatell to build a system that allows people needing healthcare information to access it via SMS on their mobile phones. The system also allows the PCT to send information out to people in a variety of ways, to provide facts, reminders, support and alerts.

The SMS-based service allows subscribers to access a wealth of health information via text message. Users can create their own profile by filling out an online questionnaire focused on common health issues. Subscribers will then receive information and advice via SMS (Short Message Service) on health issues pertinent to their profile, such as information on drinking, smoking and much more. Alternatively, users can send the system any particular health related text or phrase to receive facts on a range of topics such as obesity, safe sex or useful information such as the contact details for a 24-hour pharmacy.

Clickatell handles the message queuing and delivery within tightly controlled time and reliability parameters, to any phone, even if it's roaming between networks.

THE RESULTS

Now in its third year of use, the Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT has used the Health SMS (www.health-sms.com) system in a variety of ways, and is devising new applications all the time. The system's flexibility has allowed the organisation to grow and adapt its utilisation of SMS, and prepare it for developments into other messaging technologies such as Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) and Instant Messaging (IM).

The www.health-sms.com system allowed Heart of Birmingham teaching PCT to provide different SMS based

CASE STUDY



"I am enthusiastic about the potential of text messaging for preventive medicine - for example as decision prompts to attend screening and as a source of health information or advice about services, particularly for young people. The challenge as ever is to integrate this kind of development with our NHS IT systems in general practice."

Dr Jackie Chambers (OBE) - Director of Public Health

"This messaging platform allows us the flexibility to deliver health information to our diverse community."

Sue Turton - Assistant Director of Health Promotion

"Using www.health-sms.com, healthcare organisations can deliver health information on demand 24 hours a day directly to the mobile phone of the person who needs the information. This is powerful and often life-changing."

Phil Colledge - Managing Director, 123 Consultants

"We see an expanding future for the use of SMS messaging within health, in particular the use of multimedia messaging to deliver more exciting and engaging content."

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services targeted at different groups in the population.

Health Promotion: The health exchange (www.healthexchange.org.uk) is a partnership developed between Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT and the Birmingham city libraries. The key innovation is the exchange of ideas and practice between health workers and communities. The health exchange is utilising the facility of www.health-sms.com to facilitate the exchange of structured health information directly to the mobile phone and on demand.

Sue Turton, Assistant Director of Health Promotion, commented, "This messaging platform allows us the flexibility to deliver health information to our diverse community."

Substance addicts and smokers: Dropping a bad habit can be hard, but it becomes a bit easier with encouragement. The use of messaging has become part of the Heart of Birmingham PCT's way to encourage a healthier lifestyle. In particular, the www.health-sms.com system allows Heart of Birmingham PCT to send targeted campaigns of useful support messages to groups of smokers who are trying to give up smoking. This information is in the form of useful contact details for help with stopping smoking, along with simple reminders and encouragement to people attending sessions to help them quit.

Mr Dale Ricketts, Stop Smoking Services Manager, said, "SMS is helping reduce the number of people who give up while trying to quit smoking by sending reminders and messages of encouragement."

Health in Youth: The use of SMS by the under 25s is almost 100%. Heart of Birmingham teaching PCT has made available health information on a wide variety of teenage health issues ranging from sexual health, drugs, alcohol and smoking via the Text4U service (delivered by www.health-sms.com). These services are utilised by a very large number of teenagers to obtain good confidential information on often quite sensitive matters directly to their mobile phone.

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WHY CLICKATELL?

Text messaging has changed the way individuals, communities and enterprises communicate. Over one billion messages are sent across the globe each day. By 2010, volumes are expected to rise to almost 2.4 trillion messages a day. Quick, easy, direct and cost effective, SMS simplifies communication between businesses and their customers, offering organisations an additional way to touch clients and staff, and encourage two-way feedback beyond traditional communication channels.

Clickatell, www.clickatell.com has 8,000 clients worldwide, including the European Commission, CNN and the National Health Services in the UK. Benefits of partnering with Clickatell include access to its first tier mobile messaging platform which delivers instant worldwide reach with no lengthy negotiations with mobile operators for direct connections. Clickatell delivers messages to in excess of 700 networks in more than 200 countries. Customers also get access to new capabilities without costly hardware or software investments, and have reduced time to market with a broad spectrum of messaging functionality.

Clickatell provides well-documented SMS APIs and excellent management tools for fast integration with customers' internal systems meaning a need for fewer administrative and IT resources. Additionally, Clickatell offers the guarantee of consolidated SMS flow with the benefits of a centralised management and billing interface.