

Reaching "3G blind-spots" in Africa with mobile marketing

 By [Patrick Macgougan](#)

19 Sep 2013

With a growing percentage of the global population using mobile phones and the ability to use internet based apps through Wi-Fi and 3G, we as marketers have many options for communicating with customers via their handsets. In some emerging markets in Africa, however, a lack of 3G connectivity instantly cuts out a lot of these options.

If you are looking to use email or web based communication to reach out to customers in these markets, you may encounter problems with response rates due to lack of internet access. Some of your current and potential customers may be in areas with phone signal, but not 3G signal and no access to an internet connection.

Quick and time sensitive messaging

Last minute deals and alerts are great for selling the final few tickets, selling the last of your stock or generally catching onto anything time-sensitive. This generally works well on web and through email marketing, but when the target audience members have intermittent internet access, it's important to consider other options for communication.

Sending direct mail can be costly and slow, advertising in local publications isn't direct enough and the cost can add up.

Mobile marketing through bulk SMS can overcome this, if you can condense your core message into a text message. As we have our mobile phones with us the majority of the time, messages can be very time-sensitive and still get good results.

Another option is [USSD notifications](#) (or flash messaging) which may not be quite so common these days, but is very cheap to send. If you've not seen a flash message, these have been used for showing account balances on mobile phones. They pop up on your screen, and then disappear without being stored on the phone, hence the name 'flash messaging.'

Two-way communication

A one-way interaction may not suit some messages. You can generate two way conversation using SMS messages, this can be done with a short-code (a five-digit number that your customers can send an SMS to) or with a long-code (a regular mobile number).

Sometimes, however you need something with a little more meat to it. Using an email or a website, you can communicate visually, and offer more on-going communication with your audience. When reaching out to an audience in areas with a lack of internet coverage, SMS is sometimes not the best alternative.

USSD menus give your end users a list of options to choose from, so they can interact with you via a mobile connection. They are also session based, meaning you don't have to send and pay for messages back and forth. Like USSD notifications, USSD menus aren't stored on the phone, and disappear at the end of the session, opening up the options to more sensitive information like editing and accessing account details.

These do well in countries with poor 3G coverage as they can be used for any communication that requires a response and don't cost a lot.

Mobile app interaction

Another problem you may encounter in 3G blind-spots involves mobile apps which rely on an internet connection. If your business creates an app like this, and it is used in areas with poor 3G coverage, consider implementing In-app messaging. This is when the app generates an SMS to notify the user of an update, alert or any relevant news, allowing them to stay up-to-date using their regular mobile connection.

This can be used in the opposite direction too, meaning users can update their information on the mobile app via SMS.

These are three areas in which poor Wi-Fi and 3G coverage can cause difficulties in reaching and hearing back from current and potential customers. Options like USSD and SMS are generally good to include in your overall marketing push, as they offer quickness and directness to customers via their mobile phones.

All over the world, it's clear to see the importance of mobile for communication, and although technology has brought in even more options for communication, through the internet, it's important to consider the access to this when planning and implementing marketing campaigns.

SMS and USSD can be received by older phones, so by integrating them into your marketing, your communications do not alienate any of your audience.

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