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CATCH THE CODE

Text Messaging is hot: Short Codes make mobile phones more useful and fun

What is Text Messaging?

Text Messaging is an easy, fast and discrete way to share information using digital mobile phones. Short messages up to 136 characters – typically two or three sentences – are composed using the phone's keypad and then addressed to the area code and seven-digit number of the recipient's mobile phone. Delivery is almost instant, and the recipient's phone rings or vibrates to announce that a new message has been received. Messages can be sent between mobile phones customers of most wireless service providers in Canada and the United States.

Text Messaging is popular:

Canadians sent more than 350 million person-to-person text messages in 2003, doubling the previous year's volume of 174 million. In December 2003 alone, Canadians sent more than 39 million messages – more than 1.2 million per day.

What are Short Codes?

Short Codes are a new way to use Text Messaging that lets users interact with media outlets, companies, governments and other sources of information, products or services.

Experience this:

You see a billboard for a restaurant, but you don't know where it is. You pick up your mobile phone and with a few quick keystrokes you get detailed directions from the billboard to the front door.

Like Text Messaging, Short Codes are easy, fast and discrete. Instead of sending messages to a 10-digit phone number, you send to a Short Code. These are five or six digits long and often spell a word or brand name.

For example, the code "72346" spells "RADIO" on a phone's keypad. This makes Short Codes much easier to remember.

Why would I use a Short Code?

Short Codes take your everyday experiences and make them interactive, and take interactive experiences and make them faster and easier.

Hear this:

You're listening to a battle of the bands contest on your favourite radio station. You pick up your mobile phone and with a few quick keystrokes you've sent your choice to the next round.

For example, if your favourite radio station has a Short Code, you may be able to use it to request songs, enter contests, vote on talk show issues, receive traffic and weather reports, and access many other services.

Unlike a 1-800 number, Short Codes make busy signals and waiting on hold a thing of the past: your request or vote gets delivered while you get on with your life.

Unlike e-mail, you can use a Short Code from almost anywhere: you don't need a computer as your message is delivered right from your phone.

How do I recognize a Short Code?

Short Code instructions appearing in print or on billboards, or heard on radio and television, typically adhere to the following formula: Send "(message)" to (number). For example, if you want a traffic update from your favourite radio station, you might be instructed: Text "traffic" to 72346.

In cases where the Short Code spells a word or brand, you might see the word as well as the code, like this: Text "traffic" to RADIO (72346).

How do I find out if I can use Short Codes?

Read this:

You're flipping through your favourite newspaper and an editorial asks whether readers agree with an opinion on the burning issue of the day. You pick up your mobile phone and with a few quick keystrokes you cast your vote.

To use Short Codes, your mobile phone must be able to send text messages. Your phone's instruction manual can confirm whether the phone supports Text Messaging, and if so, will provide instructions on how to use this service. If you don't have your manual, check the Web site of your phone's manufacturer or contact your wireless service provider. You may also have to contact your wireless service provider to activate the Text Messaging service on your phone.

How do I send a message to a Short Code?

Composing and sending a message to a Short Code is the same as sending a Text Message. This varies from phone to phone, but in general, there are four easy steps:

1. Choose the option on your phone to create a new text message.
2. You address the text message by keying in the 5- or 6-digit Short Code number to which you want to send the message.
3. Within the message field, key in the message (such as "WIN") by pressing the appropriate letters on the keypad. For example, the "9" key is also labeled "WXYZ", so pressing the "9" button one time will give you the letter "W".
4. You send the message by selecting "Send". Your phone will confirm that your message has been sent.

Picture this:

You're watching your favourite series on television, but you don't like the way the plot is developing. You pick up your mobile phone and with a few quick keystrokes you change the plot of next week's episode.

Will I get messages I don't want?

No. The Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association (CWTA), which administers Short Codes, has developed specific rules and a Code of Conduct that dictates how Short Codes may be used. The CWTA and Canada's wireless service providers also review all Short Code programs before they are introduced to ensure compliance with the rules and Code.

You will not receive information on your phone unless you ask for it, and you can cancel your participation in any Short Code program at any time.