



MAGIC (Museums and Galleries in the Capital)

Research project into marketing tours for deaf and hard-of-hearing people via mobile phone text messaging (SMS)

Report written by Anya Ustaszewski, edited by Amy Bodycombe. Completed on Friday 25 July 2008.

This research project was carried out by two Access Officers at the Royal Academy of Arts between 2007-2008. It was funded by MAGIC to look at the effectiveness of marketing gallery-signed events via SMS text messaging Deaf and hard-of-hearing people

Introduction

The majority of people who are Deaf or who have hearing impairments communicate via SMS (Short Message Service) on their mobile phones. Text messaging along with email has revolutionised the way in which people who are Deaf communicate.

Prior to text messaging and email, deaf people relied on faxing and text phone – both time-consuming and restrictive methods of communication. Technology is now far easier to use, more accessible and constantly improving and it is necessary to respond to this change.

In 2006 the Royal Academy of Arts was granted funding from MAGIC to undertake a research project to test the efficacy of promoting events for Deaf and hard of hearing people using SMS alerts.

Method

Two tours were held for each of two consecutive exhibitions. Each tour was to be given using BSL, voice and lipspeaking support.

For each exhibition, one tour would be promoted using solely email, postal mail-outs and the Royal Academy of Arts magazine and leaflets. The other tour would be promoted by SMS alerts alone. The response and attendance at each tour

would be compared, as would the feedback from those who attended the tours, in order to see which method of promotion was most effective.

Publicity for this SMS alerts trial was sent by email and post to the entire mailing list – in total just over 2000 individual addresses.

Publicity was initially sent 4 months before the trial was due to take place then re-sent at 4 week intervals.

There was an excellent response. Of the many people who expressed interest 21 were selected to be part of the SMS alerts trial while the remainder would continue to receive publicity by email and post, as usual. (See Appendix A)

Of the 21 participants, 10 received text messages asking them to simply reply with their name and the number of tickets required. The other 11 were asked to text a keyword such as 'BOOK' so that it would be possible to compare which method people found to be preferable.

The Baselitz and Mellon exhibitions were chosen for the trial as these presented contrasting kinds of art, one contemporary, the other more traditional. This would allow for the fact that individual preferences for art would be a factor regarding rate of attendance at each event.

For the Baselitz exhibition, there were 2 tours, one presented by Melissa Mostyn and the other by Graham Greenfield. For Mellon, both tours were presented by Françoise Durrance. All tours featured British Sign Language interpretation and lipspeaking support.

For all of these events, the initial round of promotion took place 6-8 weeks before, by either both post and email, or by SMS alerts alone.

The events were promoted again 2 weeks before via email or SMS and then 2-4 days before.

SMS Alert Provider

Project Manager, Arthur Pottersman, approached SMS alert providers to see which would be interested in allowing free use of their services for the duration of the trial. PageOne agreed to provide a temporary account from which to send and receive SMS alerts, free of charge.

Using the PageOne account it was possible to monitor the progress of the messages which had been sent. The progress report showed which messages had been received, which were in the process of being sent and which had failed. This made it possible very early on in the process to identify that 2 numbers were

incorrect. The relevant people were contacted via email immediately to obtain the correct numbers.

User Group

It was agreed that as part of the trial, a User Group of Deaf and hard of hearing people should be recruited to give feedback regarding ways in which the SMS alerts trial, and also events in general at the Royal Academy, could be improved. Each member of the User Group was to be paid £30 as a 'thank you' for their participation.

Requests for participants for the User Group were sent out with the general promotional material for the SMS alerts project.

Those who wished to sign up for membership of the User Group were asked for their age range, whether they were profoundly deaf, whether they had been hard of hearing since birth, whether they had acquired deafness and at which age this occurred, whether they used a hearing aid or aids or a Cochlear implant, and also their preferred method of communication at events.

This was to ensure inclusion of a wide range of ages and also people who were hard of hearing since birth, who had become hard of hearing or who had acquired hearing loss at different points in their lives. The aim was for the User Group to be as representative as possible. (See Appendix B)

Of those who had applied, twelve people were selected to make up the User Group. This was done partly on a 'first come first served' basis and also partly by ensuring that there was a wide range of members. It was compulsory that all members of the User Group had to be taking part in the SMS alerts trial in order that they could give their feedback on this.

Researcher

It was decided that in order to make sure that the research project was conducted to high standards, a professional researcher, Vivienne Price, would be recruited in order to review and give feedback on the planning and execution of the project.

Results

After the 2 incorrect phone numbers were rectified, the rate of successful delivery for SMS alerts was 100%.

With email and post around 5% of deliveries fail due to incorrect addresses – even though these addresses are obtained from the official websites of the organisations.

The reply rate for emails is quite low – around 10-20%, although this can in part be accounted for by the fact that around half of the contacts are organisations rather than individuals; although as a result of doing this individuals who attend or work at these organisations make contact to request that their individual address is added to the mailing list.

Participants who used one particular UK network were having difficulty replying to SMS alerts due to the way in which the Royal Academy of Arts' number was displayed by their phones. With the help of PageOne and also the assistance of the relevant networks, this problem was identified and fixed within a week.

Once the above difficulty was resolved the average reply rate for SMS alerts was 1 in 3.

The first tour of the Baselitz exhibition was given by Melissa Mostyn on Friday the 12th of October and was promoted via SMS alerts alone. This tour had 11 attendees. The following tour of the exhibition, given by Graham Greenfield on Friday the 26th of October and promoted via email and post, had 7 attendees. This shows that for the Baselitz exhibition, promoting the event via SMS alerts lead to a 57% increase in attendance.

The first tour of the Mellon exhibition, on Friday the 16th of November, was promoted by SMS and the second, on Friday the 30th of November, by email and post. Although again, the response rate for those contacted via SMS alert was higher, due to illness many attendees contacted me by SMS to ask if they could switch to the tour at the later date.

So although the numbers for this show that attendance for the first tour was lower, the fact remains that attendance among those who had been contacted via SMS was far higher. (See Appendix C)

Feedback

Substantial positive feedback was received from those who had agreed to be contacted via SMS alerts. They found this to be a quick and easy way of being made aware of and reminded about forthcoming tours.

During the course of the SMS alerts trial and also after its completion, many people continued to ask if they could sign up to the scheme and were very disappointed when it was explained that this was simply a trial which was taking place over a temporary fixed period of time.

Members of the User Group were asked whether, when replying to SMS messages, they preferred to simply press 'reply' and write and send their response or whether they preferred using a key word such as "BOOK" in their reply.

Most reported that they preferred simply to press the reply key, and the remainder said that they had no preference either way.

A meeting was held on the 17th of March to close the MAGIC research project. Invites were sent to all people and organisations on the mailing list, and also to Access Officers at other London galleries and museums.

Again, the feedback was very positive and all attendees were keen to see SMS alerts being used again in the future.

Reasons cited were:

- It is quicker and easier to use than email or written communication.
- It is also simple to forward on to a friend or family member who may also be interested in the event being promoted.
- Mobile phones are something that people have with them most of the time. It is easy to read quickly and reply to a text message when out, on a bus or train, when at home or at work. Checking email requires regular access to email, turning on the computer, activating the internet connection, logging into an email account, waiting for various pages to download etc.; and this is assuming people have internet access at home – if not then it is necessary to visit somewhere such as an internet café, which can become expensive, or a local library where it may be necessary to book a computer in advance or be prepared to queue for an indefinite period.
- Additionally, whilst there are some exceptions, text messages are generally received very soon after being sent whereas email can vary from taking a few minutes, to a few hours or even a few days to arrive with the intended recipient due to issues with the various different service providers, where their servers are located, whether they are having any technical problems etc.; all issues which can be difficult for large international organisations to repair.
- As demonstrated, when a problem did occur with the SMS alerts, the cause was identified and rectified in a matter of days and all parties were very keen to work together to find a solution as quickly as possible.

- SMS is a more efficient form of communication. When people make contact via email, phone or fax to book a place on a tour and are unable to come due to illness or other commitments, on account of the fact that there is a lot of variation in the time it takes for these communications to be received, notification may not be received until after the tour has taken place, or the person may simply not turn up.

Further points and suggestions which were discussed include:

- Most attendees prefer that all BSL tours now take place on Friday evenings as this means that those who work are able to attend.
- All attendees agreed that it was useful to be given a written summary of the topics to be covered before each tour as this means that if they inadvertently miss any part of the BSL communication, they are still able to keep their place and follow the narrative of the tour.
- Some attendees, in particular those representing organisations for Deaf people, said that some Deaf persons felt anxious about attending events as they were not very knowledgeable about art and were concerned that they would not be able to follow the content of the tours. It was suggested that some kind of one-day introductory event should be held for Deaf and hard of hearing people, involving all the main London galleries.

Conclusion

The ease and speed of communication which SMS alerts allow meant that it was always possible to know who would be attending the SMS-promoted tours. Should someone be unable to attend it was far more likely that notification of this would be received and also of whether or not they wanted to book a place at a subsequent tour.

This makes it easier for the Access Officer and other staff involved to know how many people to expect for each tour, allowing time immediately before and during the event to be used more effectively.

On account of the results of this research project and also the consistent positive feedback, the Royal Academy of Arts is planning to reinstate SMS alerts on a permanent basis from September 2008.

Appendix A

Gender	Age Group	How participants are usually notified of other events
M	40-55	Email and SMS
M	26-40	Email
M	40-55	Email
F	40-55	Email
F	56+	Post
M	40-55	Email
F	40-55	Email
F	40-55	Poster
F	40-55	Deaf UK events emails
M	26-40	Email and SMS
F	56+	Email and post
M	26-40	Email
F	26-40	Email
F	40-55	Email, post and SMS
F	40-55	Email
F	40-55	Email
M	56+	Email
F	56+	Email and post
M	40-55	Email and post
F	40-55	Email
M	26-40	Email and SMS

Appendix B

Gender	Age Group	Hearing Impairment Type	Assistive Technology	Preferred Method Of Interpretation / Communication Support
M	56+	Acquired hearing loss	Hearing Aid	Lip Speaking
M	26-40	Acquired hearing loss from age 29	n/s	n/s
F	40-55	Acquired hearing loss from age 29	Bone Anchored Hearing Aid	BSL
F	56+	Acquired hearing loss from age 25	Hearing Aid	Lip-speaking
F	40-55			Lip-speaking
F	40-55	Acquired hearing loss from age 11		BSL

M	26-40	Hearing impairment since birth	Hearing Aid	No preference.
M	26-40	Hearing impairment since birth	Hearing Aid	BSL
F	40-55	Hearing impairment since birth	None	BSL
F	56+	Hearing impairment since birth	None	BSL
F	40-55	Hearing impairment since birth	Hearing Aid	No preference.
M	40-55	Hearing impairment since birth	None	BSL

Appendix C

Event	Manner of Promotion	No. of attendees from SMS	No. of attendees from email and post	No. to cancel via SMS	No. to reschedule via SMS	No. to cancel via email	No. to reschedule via email
Baselitz 12/10/07	SMS	11	n/a	1	0	n/a	n/a
Baselitz 26/10/07	Email and post	0	7	n/a	n/a	0	0
Mellon 16/11/07	SMS	5	n/a	7	7	n/a	n/a
Mellon 30/11/07	Email and post	7	4	0	0	0	0