



Voice short code explosion

Will Neale, CEO and founder at Orca Digital and Chair of the Voice Short Code Working Group on AIME, gives his view on the revenue generating advantages of voice short codes

It is not often that new revenue-driving opportunities open up for the telecoms channel, so the recent move by Everything Everywhere, which announced the launch of its 0p per minute and 15p per minute voice short code (VSC), was highly significant.

By joining other mobile operators and making cross-network free-to-user VSC fully operational, it has handed the channel an entirely new product to sell. Indeed, we are already seeing a strong appetite for freephone VSC from businesses looking to encourage inbound calls from potential customers. Along with low price point VSCs, this market is about to take off with an inevitable land grab emerging over the next few months.

The primary driver of this new market is the ongoing controversy around non-geographic numbers. Non-geographic numbers, for example 0845, 090 and 0800, have long been used by television shows for TV voting, as well as by businesses that receive a high volume of calls, such as high street banks and insurance companies. However, when calling non-geographic numbers from a mobile, there is typically a lack of transparency over the cost of the call.

Bill shocker

Mobile operators also make a significant margin on these numbers, which often results in 'bill shock'. Research by Orca Digital with respected pollster, YouGov, found that 49% of consumers have been surprised to see how much they have been charged for calling these numbers from a mobile, and 90% believe organisations should be more transparent on call rates.

But it's not just consumers that are suffering; non-geographic numbers are also bad for business. According to Ofcom, nearly half of businesses (47%) are concerned that non-geographic numbers were a disadvantage to their business by putting people off calling.

As well as discouraging new business, non-geographic numbers can also make a bad situation worse; when NatWest recently suffered a computer glitch that prevented millions of customers from paying bills or moving money, it

had to take the step of setting up an alternative local number for customer care, so that unhappy customers wouldn't become further aggravated by having to call a non-geographic number.

Brand damage

Furthermore, our research with YouGov found that the use of non-geographic contact numbers can also damage a company's brand, as the lack of price transparency generates mistrust and high call charges impact customer loyalty. With Ofcom estimating that consumers spend a staggering £1.9 billion on non-geographic calls

rate, while broadcasters no longer have to advise that 'calls from mobiles may cost considerably more'.

Not only has this benefited broadcasters by establishing VSC as a trusted voting mechanic so encouraging more votes, it has also thrust VSC in front of millions of consumers, making it much easier for businesses to follow suit.

Tip of the iceberg

TV voting is just the tip of the iceberg. While VSC has historically been the domain of niche premium rate service providers at higher rate tariffs, the recent launch of lower consumer price points, and now mobile freephone numbers, across all mobile operators in the UK is resulting in adoption amongst large organisations for both sales and customer care functions.

By using VSC, businesses can bring down the cost of a call for the consumer without impacting their margin from each call. Furthermore, businesses are also able to clarify the cost of making a call from a mobile, as it is the same across all networks, therefore ensuring price transparency and preventing mistrust.

We're very excited about these developments and will be further developing our channel to fully exploit the opportunity; after all, the market for non-geographic telephony (across 08 and 09 numbers) in the UK dwarfs the SMS market. Soon mobile users will be using memorable five digit numbers to call their bank, place a bet or buy a mobile phone.

With a number of VSC launches expected imminently by major brands and with ongoing discussions with many other large businesses, some of whom receiving hundreds of millions of inbound calls per year, we see huge opportunity. Indeed, we are

expanding our channel presence to help ensure we fully capitalise on what promises to be an exciting twelve months ahead.

Orca Digital helps monetise live video and interactive services, connecting users across the web and mobile. It is a trusted partner of all the mobile operators in the UK, working closely with them to deliver innovative new services across their 3G networks. It has built its business around mobile voice short codes.



Will Neale, CEO and founder at Orca Digital

every year, it is easy to see why consumers become suspicious, unaware that most of this ends up in operators' coffers.

Another major driver for this market is the high profile application of VSCs for TV voting. Having made their mainstream debut only recently on the BBC's The Voice, VSC are already ubiquitous across all TV voting formats and channels.

Viewers can now vote using their mobile, without being charged a premium over the advertised