



## In the Future Customers Will Do More to Help Themselves Over Mobile

*An interview with John Keane, Director, Mobile Solutions  
Product Management & Partner Relations, Premiere Global Services*

*"Air2Web's mobile customer care solution helps us give our clients interactive self service capabilities that enable them to exchange information with mobile users when and where they want to. This has very powerful implications for how our clients can interact with their own end customers."*

As Director of Mobile Solutions at Premiere Global Services, a \$600M telecommunications company based in Atlanta, Georgia, John Keane is spearheading Premiere Solutions' initiatives in the burgeoning field of mobile solutions. John recently caught up with Frost & Sullivan's eBulletin Editor, Erin Lindholm, to discuss the value of two-way interaction and how to use notification reminders to build customer allegiance. Keane explains that in the future we will all be doing more to service our own customer care needs over mobile, and consumers will even come to expect it that way ... here's how:

### **Erin Lindholm: What's unique about mobile marketing and how these initiatives connect with consumers?**

**John Keane:** What's really different is the two-way interaction. Magazine ads, television commercials, billboards and radio ads are really outbound messages, what's called a broadcast message, where the communication is one-way. What's unique about the mobile device is the ability to send a message out, knowing who your audience is and what they're interested in and getting feedback from them almost immediately. When someone leaves the house they always have three things with them: their keys, their wallet and their cell phone. In a lot of instances, when you want to reach your customer, the mobile phone is the best way to do it.

If you send a notification out by e-mail, the problem is that not everyone carries their laptop with them, or they don't have it turned on. But if you send it out to a mobile phone — say it's a medical reminder — there's a pretty good chance that the person has their phone on them. So really, mobile messaging allows you to get the information to the person you want in a time-sensitive manner and to get feedback from that person. That inbound message enables you to then take appropriate action on what is now a two-way interaction, which you really don't get with any other medium.

### **EL: It seems to me that when messages are sent by e-mail, most of the time they don't even want you to respond.**

**JK:** Right, and a lot of people just put them into the spam bucket. And that's another thing, at least about North America, which is different from pretty much the rest of the world. In North America, the individual has to perform a conscious opt-in, meaning that the enterprise, say it's a big retail store, can't just start blasting out messages to the customer. The customer has to say, "I want to start receiving these messages." So when they do receive it, they know it's something they want. They don't ignore it.

### **EL: Do you have the ability to monitor and see who opens it, open rate percentages, metrics like that?**

**JK:** To a certain extent, yes. However, the carriers today are not all set up to meet the Mobile Marketing Association's standards, which is essentially to send an acknowledgement that the message has been delivered to the handset successfully and that it's been opened. Most carriers today do send acknowledgement that it's been successfully delivered to the handset, so we do know that users have received it. But we don't really have the data on if it's been opened. If within that message, let's say, you actually had a URL to a retail site, when they click on that link, you can then track the fact that a person went to the Web site. So you can sort of monitor it that way, but there's no true way to capture every time someone has opened a SMS message — yet.

### **EL: Premiere Global describes its mobile initiatives as "on demand communication." Can we talk about the value of the on demand aspect of these mobile messages? By on demand do you mean it's on demand for when your customer wants to send the information out? Or is it on demand for their customer who is receiving it?**

**JK:** It's really a little bit of both. Certainly, from our customer's point of view, "on demand" refers to the ability to send a message out when they want to, and we have a couple of different ways of doing that, which are unique to Premiere Global. For smaller businesses that don't really have an IT shop in-house, but still want to send messages out, we provide a Web portal that allows a customer to do an ad-hoc message delivery, so they can either type in



the message they want to send and enter in the phone numbers they want to send it to, or they can upload a template for that message and a full list of phone numbers and send it out through the Web portal.

Or, if it's a larger corporation that has a sophisticated business rules engine, typically they may want to use mobile as certain business events occur by sending messages through our APIs (application programming interfaces). A large corporation can say, "When (a) happens and (b) happens, send a message through this API to this phone number," and the message will go out through our platform to the person's handset. When the person responds, it will come back through our platform and back to the business, which can then take action. One scenario might be when a bank wants to send out an overdraft notice, so when the business rules engine at the bank says, "This bank account has been overdrafted," a message saying something like, "Dear John, your bank account ending in ---123 is overdrawn \$30," goes out to the customer's mobile device. When the person responds back confirming receipt or opts to make a payment, we then send that message back to the bank and the bank can take appropriate action. So APIs are very powerful that way.

**EL: Can you share any real-world examples of an SMS campaign or a mobile marketing campaign that is a really great example of what's going on in mobile right now?**

**JK:** A perfect example is the value of a notification reminder to companies in the medical field. In providing a reminder to take their prescriptions on a daily basis, a large pharmaceutical company offers a value-added service to its customers, which also creates an affinity you don't get with e-mail or other mediums. A person receiving reminders that say, "Hey, don't forget to take your prescription for the day," gets used to seeing that every day. It creates a strong stickiness between the individual and company that makes it harder for them to switch to providers. Another example in the market that you're seeing today is a lot of large financial institutions are sending out reminders to people when they are past-due on a payment. Nowadays, you get a phone call to your house and you don't recognize it, so you don't pick it up. If you see mail from someone you don't want to hear from, you throw it out.

The difference with SMS reminders is two-fold: First of all, the reminder is worthwhile to a person. But what's really nice about SMS reminders is that these messages can have a phone number embedded in them. Since customers are already on their mobile phones, they can simply connect to customer service with the push of a button. This call back action is a great way to prompt someone to make that payment. We have a large car retailer who is doing that to remind customers to make their car payment that is a few days' past due and they're getting great success, about a 40% call-in rate, which is unheard of really. And the customers weren't upset. They say, "Oh, thank you for reminding me." It's been incredibly successful.

**EL: What a great story. So, obviously, these mobile initiatives are moving into all sorts of different sectors. Where do you think we'll be five years from now?**

**JK:** Five years from now, people are still going to be receiving mobile notifications and still receiving information they want. But instead of just getting a basic SMS message, it might be a message that directly leads a person to take action: "My accounts are overdrawn, so I can pull up an application and actually transfer money from my savings directly into my checking." Or it's that coupon from a large retailer that will open up their online store where you can buy that dress or those pants on the spot. That's going to be the future. Not only are you receiving a message and able to respond, but you will actually be able to complete a purchase or complete a transaction from a mobile device. That's the direction it's heading.