Chapter 8.12

The "Trigger" Experience:
Text Messaging as an Aide Memoire to Alert Students in Mobile Usage of Teaching and Learning Resources

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ABSTRACT

This case study chapter will outline the results of a 2006 pilot test into the use of Short Message Service (SMS) to augment the provision of student administrative services currently available through a university website. The pilot conducted utilised an SMS Prototype Tool Trigger that enabled dynamic information transfer between staff and students. Trigger facilitated live update reminders that assisted students to schedule their time and better organise themselves. Specifically, SMS technology was used to deliver physical class locations, availability and web addresses of iPod resources, important events, alerts for multimedia, examination schedules, and, assessment feedback by 'pushing' information to students. Trigger also provided students with pull access to study schedules and requirements. The aim of the test was to evaluate student response to the use of Trigger to improve the learning environment. The case study will identify student responses to the 2006 pilot and describe a current project that has extended the number of students participating in the study.

INTRODUCTION

The product of contemporary civilization's symbiotic relationship with technology is the prospect of being immersed in data smog (Shenk, 1997), an experience that can lead to a state of

information anxiety (Wurman, 1989) in some individuals. External aids to memory have served humanity as mnemonic devices since the first person tied a piece of string around their finger to remember something important. In this era we have digital watches, PDAs and mobile phones to act as memory prompts and prosthetic aids to

time management. In the case of mobile phones, these devices virtually eliminate the need to recall phone numbers with their electronic storage capacity capable of holding hundreds of personal contact details (this being a conservative estimate). An emerging adjunct to the mnemonic facility of the mobile phone is the use of text messaging to emit and receive alerts. SMS has rapidly become a commonly employed communications protocol amongst mobile phone owners (Faulkner & Fintan, 2005). Mobile phones permit users to almost communicate in parallel modes, these being voice and text. An itinerant technology that has spawned a cult dialect, text messaging is the austere equivalent of conventional e-mail: Economical in practice and terse in delivery with standard messages capped at 160 characters. It is the fragmented lingo of students the world over and as such an excellent candidate for a personal aide memoire. The *Trigger* system outlined in this chapter describes one approach to using an existing means of communication (namely SMS) to function as a mnemonic construct to enable better personal organisation of a student's scholastic activities.

BACKGROUND: MOBILE COMMUNICATION

Mobile phone penetration of the Australian population is high and expected to remain that way. In 2006, 950 million mobile phones were expected to be sold, a figure that far exceeded the 234 million PC's. (Arvind & Hicks, 2006). The number of mobile phones owned has increased from 8.1 million in 1999-2000 to 19.8 million in 2008 (The Age, 6/04/2008). This recent explosion in SMS use for the purpose of communication is global in nature, although not in all countries. However, the 20.5 billion messages sent in the UK in 2003, (Faulkner & Fintan, 2005) substantiate SMS as the

Figure 1. Text messages, Australia mobile market statistics (2008)
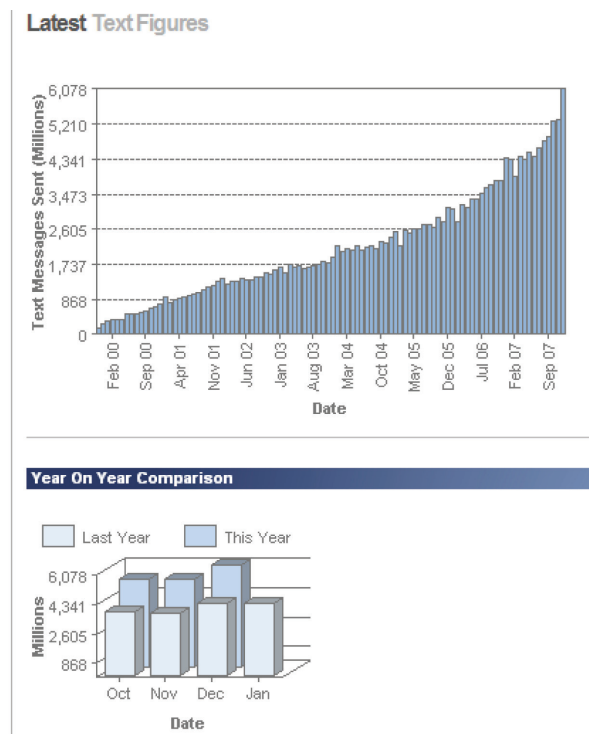
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