

**Going Mobile with Email in China***Tony Cheung, Vice President, China, Epsilon International*➔ [Expert's Column](#)**Keywords :** Mobile email marketing China, China m-commerce**Date :** 4-27-2009[Newsletter](#) > [Asia Pacific](#) > [2009](#) > [Apr](#) > [Expert's Column](#)**Tony Cheung, VP Mainland China, shares his insights on targeting the mobile consumer in the Middle Kingdom.**

With the emergence of smartphones as a viable alternative to the PC for accessing emails and the Internet, opportunities are opening up for marketers to leverage these devices as a new consumer communication channel. The question remains, however: are consumers as amenable to receiving permission-based emails on their mobile devices as they are through the established large-screen format of the desktop and laptop?

Of the 182 million people with web-enabled mobile phones in China, by the end of 2008, 117 million had used the devices to connect to the Internet (source: CNNIC Report, 2009); this compares to the 18 million consumers who connect to the internet through a mobile device in the USA (out of 57 million who own one).

More interestingly, according to Epsilon's 2008 Survey on Consumer Attitudes to Email in Asia Pacific, 34% of Chinese consumers indicated that they accessed email on their mobile device, compared to 29% in Hong Kong, 27% in Japan and only 6% in Australia. These statistics, when combined with that fact that in China more than 10% of the population discovers web services through their mobile device first, show clearly that there is a large untapped potential for the use of the mobile email channel for permission-based marketing activities. The issue is how to develop a strategy that can successfully leverage this market when volumes of SPAM – both email and SMS – continue to grow.

The answer probably lies in the delivery of relevant and timely communications that look to drive both e- and m-commerce activities. According to BDA (a China based telecoms and internet consultancy), ecommerce in general will get a boost from reduced economic growth in China in 2009 as price-sensitive shoppers go online to compare prices and perhaps purchase. This clearly has an impact on the potential of just-in-time email marketing offers driven by point-of-sale calls to action.

While the current lack of a widespread 3G infrastructure is not an absolute barrier to mobile email marketing, and can increased levels of ROI for marketers, it does

nonetheless impose constraints. Successful case studies from the US and the rest of Asia tend to exploit the potential for direct interplay between the 3G-enabled mobile and broadband-enabled Internet, with clickable links to content outside of the email driving instant responses, registrations and even purchases – as in the iPhone App Store for example. Current 2G infrastructure simply cannot support this kind of interaction – but 3G Chinese style (the principles are the same, but the technology is different from the West) is on its way soon.

In addition, in China, where according to our own research more than 60% of mobile email is viewed on a Windows Mobile device, 17% on Symbian, 7% on Palm and only 5% on Blackberry, the email creative format and its ability to be rendered and accessed across multiple platforms is critical. This issue alone, if not considered in the email creative and segmentation strategies, potentially limits the sophistication, design and interactivity of campaigns.

Design is important, but subject line is even more important. In the mobile environment, the first objective is simply to stay in the inbox and not get deleted. Value has to be established as quickly as possible: 58% of those surveyed indicated they 'browse' emails in their mobile device, making an instant 'keep or delete' decision.

So, should you be investing in mobile email campaign strategies in China yet? Yes, most definitely, and we have clients in the travel and gaming sectors who are already seeing an impact on their bottom line with carefully developed simple html and text creatives driving consumers to mobile friendly sites. But until we see 3G bandwidth the limitations are clear.

What will be interesting to see in China is how the expected shift in the balance of power in smartphones once iPhone is introduced, possibly in summer 2009, will impact the creativity of emails and the effectiveness of campaign-led landing pages and micro-sites.

Until that time, keep to one basic principle: simple is best. Text works for everyone whether they are sitting at a desk or riding the bus. ■