

Participant Media & Waterfall Mobile Join To Protest “The Cove”

A Case Study in Digital Activism

MAY 2010



waterfall mobile

The Campaign

Winner of the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and winner of the 2009 Sundance Film Festival's Audience Award, "The Cove" follows a team of activists and filmmakers as they infiltrate a heavily-guarded cove in Taiji, Japan.

In this remote village, filmmakers witness and document horrific activities hidden from the public as more than 20,000 dolphins and porpoises are slaughtered each year, turning the water red with blood. The meat, containing toxic levels of mercury, is then sold as food in Japan – oftentimes labeled as whale meat.

Participant Media, the studio behind "An Inconvenient Truth," "Syriana," and "Good Night, And Good Luck," distributed "The Cove" domestically.

Participant and their online community, TakePart, were seeking a way to keep the gripping experience of the film fresh and relevant in the minds of viewers, and hired San Francisco-based Waterfall Mobile to develop an SMS campaign that would reach potential citizen activists directly.

Waterfall Mobile designed a digital messaging program that engaged viewers at their highest moment of inspiration – the closing credits of "The Cove" – and kept them informed and activated agents of environmental change.

This was the first mobile campaign for Participant Media, and a test case for mobile's viability as a means of stimulating activism.

Campaign Objectives:

- Build a mobile subscriber list
- Engage viewers before they leave the theater
- Get people to click through to sign a petition
- Stop the slaughtering of more than 20,000 dolphins and porpoises in Japan

The Technology Solution

Participant Media selected Waterfall Mobile's Msgme platform to power the mobile campaign for "The Cove."

The Msgme platform empowers carriers, brands, agencies and technology companies to manage digital messaging and subscribers across mobile and social channels, including SMS, MMS, mobile apps, voice, Facebook and Twitter. Msgme enhances these channels by coupling seamless integration of mobile web, video, coupons and QR codes, with direct targeting tools such as location, demographic and user preferences.

With help from Waterfall Mobile, Participant Media leveraged the power of Msgme to create a broad-based mobile subscriber

"You don't usually see short codes after a film, but people get inspired after documentaries. We wanted to get people at the moment of inspiration, and we think mobile is a great way to do this."

– Patrick J. Kearney, VP, Participant Media

list and widely distribute news and information about "The Cove" with ease.

When viewers of the film texted in to the short code ("text DOLPHIN to 44144") they joined the mobile subscriber list. After opting in to the list, texters were sent a message with a link to sign a petition to shut down "The Cove," which was later sent to President Obama and the Japanese Ambassador to the U.S., Ichiro Fujisaki.



The list opt-in and instant gratification of signing the petition.

The Results

The mobile subscriber list was then used to keep people engaged with the cause in the race to shut down the cove.

The campaign experienced a remarkable conversion rate during the first weekend of domestic release, with a nine percent opt-in rate of moviegoers texting DOLPHIN to 44144 after seeing the message on screen. This is an unusually high conversion rate for an opt-in program.



Additionally, 29 percent of those who subscribed also clicked through on the reply text to the petition supporting the closing of the cove.

While in theaters, the documentary continued to motivate nearly one in ten activists to turn on, text in and speak out against the slaughter of dolphins in a Japanese village during its closing credits.

Participant Media added tens of thousands of mobile subscribers to its mobile list from “The Cove”’s first week in theaters through the recent release of the DVD. As more and more people watched the documentary on DVD and heard awards season buzz, the number of mobile subscribers continued to grow.

Oscar Night & Beyond

On March 7, 2010, “The Cove” won the Oscar for Best Documentary at the 82nd Annual Academy Awards. When their names were called, the filmmakers brought a sign with them to the stage that read “Text DOLPHIN to 44144.” “The Cove” subject Ric O’Barry briefly lifted the sign while director Louie Psihoyos was giving his acceptance speech.

Although the sign was only onscreen for a few seconds before the Oscar telecast producers cut away, a new phase of the mobile campaign had begun – one that further demonstrated the unifying power of mobile marketing.

After an initial spike in text-ins to the “Cove” list, new subscriptions grew substantially during the hours after the Oscar telecast. This was due to an impromptu grassroots digital activism campaign that took root on Twitter and other social media platforms. Seizing on the fact that the Oscar telecast had cut away from the sign – and cut off Mr. Psihoyos’ acceptance speech – citizen activists tweeted and re-tweeted variations on the phrase “Text DOLPHIN to 44144” to spread the message of “The Cove.”

In the days that followed, “Text DOLPHIN to 44144” received tens of thousands of tweets, retweets, Facebook mentions, blog posts and mainstream media stories. Even Ellen Degeneres tweeted about it from @TheEllenShow, setting off a new round of subscriptions from her 4.3MM followers.

Within days of the televised broadcast, subscribers to “The Cove” mobile marketing list had nearly doubled – from about 38,000 to 71,500, or a +88% increase. Seizing the opportunity, on March 10th, a message was sent to subscribers pointing to Louie Psihoyos’ speech he would have delivered if he had time. Nearly 8% clicked through to watch the YouTube video.

The visibility surrounding “The Cove” has put continued pressure on Japan. The cove itself has closed, and the Oscar win has brought international scrutiny to the issue.

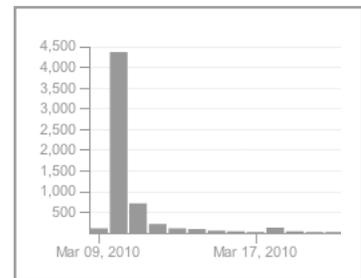
“The Cove” was the first time Participant has so prominently featured a mobile campaign as an in-theater call-to-action. Since the successful campaign and amazing feedback, Participant Media plans to use mobile for many of its projects and is currently certifying a dedicated short code.

The mobile list currently has more than 100,000 subscribers and is still growing. Participant Media/TakePart are continuing to engage with this group on various marine causes.

All goals set for the campaign were successfully achieved.



Timely placement of the CTA during the Oscars accelerated list growth.



URL tracking of clicks on the YouTube CTA within the text blast to subscribers shows willingness to engage.



Participant Media, TakePart and Waterfall Mobile were honored for this campaign as Best Wireless Promotion in the 2010 Adweek Buzz Awards.



Etcetera

Selected Press Coverage

BrandWeek
Mobile Marketer
Mobile Marketing Watch
GoMo News
The New York Times
Los Angeles Times
The Huffington Post
Mashable

Companies

Participant Media (<http://www.participantmedia.com/>)
Waterfall Mobile (<http://www.waterfallmobile.com/>)

Solution

Waterfall Mobile's Msgme (www.msgme.com)

Key Impacts

- Participant Media added tens of thousands of subscribers to its mobile list (and it's still growing – 99,000 as of 5/1/10).
- The campaign and the film helped contribute to the shutting down of the cove in Japan.
- The results proved mobile is a viable platform for Participant Media, which is now using it for additional projects and is setting up a dedicated short code.

Contact

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About Waterfall Mobile

Waterfall Mobile is the leader in digital messaging and CRM for enterprises. The company's products, Msgme and AlertU, have revolutionized the way companies manage communications with their end users. The Msgme platform empowers carriers, brands, agencies and technology companies to manage digital messaging and subscribers across mobile and social channels, including SMS, MMS, mobile apps, voice, Facebook and Twitter. Msgme enhances these channels by coupling seamless integration of mobile web, video, coupons and QR codes, with direct targeting tools such as location, demographic and user preferences. Waterfall's emergency alert notification platform, AlertU, is the industry's first two-way, multichannel notification system serving as a critical component of the emergency communications infrastructure for over 2 million individuals.

Waterfall's customers include Anheuser-Busch, Nokia, Ubisoft, Constant Contact, Guthy-Renker, PETA, Roc Nation, WPP, Publicis, Participant Media, and the California Community College system. Backed by Vista Equity Partners, Waterfall is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in New York, Los Angeles and Austin. For more information, please visit www.waterfallmobile.com.

About Participant Media

Participant Media is a Los Angeles-based entertainment company that focuses on socially relevant, commercially viable feature films, documentaries and television, as well as publishing and digital media. Participant Media is headed by CEO Jim Berk and was founded in 2004 by philanthropist Jeff Skoll, who serves as Chairman. Ricky Strauss is President.

Participant exists to tell compelling, entertaining stories that bring to the forefront real issues that shape our lives. For each of its projects, Participant creates extensive social action and advocacy programs which provide ideas and tools to transform the impact of the media experience into individual and community action. Participant's films include *The Kite Runner*, *Charlie Wilson's War*, *Darfur Now*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Good Night and Good Luck*., *Syriana*, *Standard Operating Procedure*, *The Visitor*, *The Soloist*, *Food, Inc.* and *The Informant!*
www.participantmedia.com

About TakePart

TakePart.com is an independent online community that connects its members directly to the issues that inspire them to engage, contribute and take action. Their team of editors, writers, and researchers curate and deliver actions in context with in-depth primers to the social, environmental, political and cultural issues of our day.