

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**BULKSMS.COM**

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### **Mobile takes off in the run up to the 2009 elections**

South African political parties are increasingly turning to cellphones as a campaign tool in the run up to the 2009 South African national elections. Inspired by Barack Obama's 2008 US presidential campaign, some parties are exploring the use of SMS messaging and other mobile campaigns to compliment their online and offline electioneering.

Mobile reach in South Africa is said to be 90% of the total population. This is good news for political parties seeking to get their election messages out to all citizens. While the digital donga still limits access to the Internet for many South Africans, especially in poorer and rural areas, this is not the case with cellphones.

"SMS messaging provides the most easily deployed communications medium when using a service provider offering an SMS messaging solution. You do not need the latest handsets to use SMS and, unlike MMS, SMS does not need to be set up," says Dr Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com, a global mobile messaging firm headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa.

"In addition to its potential reach as a messaging tool," continues Dr Streicher, "SMS provides the most cost-effective campaign tool for political parties. The cost of sending a targeted message to party members far outweighs other mass media communication costs."

#### ***Cellphones and the 2009 elections***

Some of the more prominent political parties in South Africa are using the mobile channel as a campaign tool for the 2009 elections.

"Political parties are asking supporters to provide a cellphone number when joining as a party member. This allows parties to create an opt-in database of contacts. The party can then communicate with this supporter database in the run up to, as well as after, the election," says Dr Streicher.

The African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDM) allow voters to subscribe to receive regular party news alerts to their cellphone. The UDM provides supporters with an option to receive an SMS reminder on when to cast their vote.

According to Dr Streicher, "Another a major trend we are seeing in the run up for this election is the adoption of mobile donations by political parties."

Many parties are using the POCIT Elect m-payment gateway for collecting contributions from supporters, including the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the African Christian Democratic Party who promote this donation line on their websites. The Congress of the People (Cope) also advertises their mobile donation line on their website. Supporters can send an SMS to a premium rate number to make a once-off donation of R10 or R30 or they can choose to make a monthly contribution of R50. Both the DA and Cope promote their SMS donation lines on Facebook.

Some other mobile political campaigning trends are also evident. The UDM has enabled supporters to use SMS to pay membership fees. The ACDP and Cope have provided election officials' cellphone numbers on their websites to encourage direct access to political leaders. The voters can send an SMS alert about problems in their local community to the UDM. The Independent Democrats (ID) encourage the youth to

voice their political views to the party via SMS. The DA is actively driving party supporters to the SA Elections website to poll a virtual vote by SMS'ing the party's abbreviation to a shortcode.

Dr Streicher also noted that there are some even more innovative mobile campaigns focusing on interaction and participation by citizens. The ID has a ringtone of the party's campaign song available for download. The ANC, ACDP and DA have launched a dot mobi site that allows supporters to access party information and news using the mobile Internet. The UDM has developed *UDMconnect*, an SMS communication solution to send out reminders for rallies or updates on party matters as well receive SMS feedback from party members.

### ***The benefits of SMS messaging***

There are also other applications of SMS messaging during the election period. In the build up to voter registration, citizens could check to see if they were registered to vote by SMS'ing their identity number to a shortcode advertised by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

"In addition to streamlining information about voter registration," says Dr Streicher, "cellphones increase organisational reach and allow political parties to keep in touch with the election officials when they are in the campaign trail."

### ***Election monitoring via SMS***

Politicians should not discount that citizens are able to make their voice heard using SMS messaging. Citizens can mobilise and use their cellphones to engage with political campaigns. Citizens could start a viral campaign by circulating SMS jokes or ringtones aimed at political leaders.

"SMS messaging could provide a way of citizen election monitoring where election-related violence or intimidation can be reported directly to the media, a political party or an independent organisation such as the IEC or the Social Justice Coalition," say Dr Streicher.

### ***SMS as a political campaign tool***

SMS messaging is gaining traction as a political campaign tool, especially for communicating directly with party members to mobilise support or spread the party's political position on issues as well as a mechanism for collecting fees or donations.

According to Dr Streicher, "There is talk of the 2014 elections taking on mobile as a key campaign tool as political parties expand on, or even initiate, their online presence."

"While this will be an important step in digitising electioneering, it will require political parties to adopt a digital strategy that integrates SMS messaging and the mobile Internet into their Web and traditional media campaigns," concludes Dr Streicher.

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### **About BulkSMS.com**

[BulkSMS.com](http://BulkSMS.com), a division of Celerity Systems (Pty) Ltd, has been in operation since 2000 and is headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa. BulkSMS is a leading wireless application service provider offering bulk SMS messaging solutions to large and small businesses, public benefit organisations, and individuals. BulkSMS.com has a global market presence, including Europe, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. To further an organisation's SMS communication needs, BulkSMS offers two-way bulk SMS messaging, premium rate solutions and supports mobile marketing

campaigns. BulkSMS flagship messaging solution is the BulkSMS Text Messenger, a desktop application. BulkSMS is a member of the Wireless Application Service Provider Association (WASPA).

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