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Campaigns Embrace Use of Text Messages

By AMY SCHATZ

WASHINGTON -- Will u vote 4 me?

Text messaging went mainstream as a political tool yesterday as Democratic candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton launched a service asking supporters to sign up for regular text-messaged campaign updates.

Mrs. Clinton isn't the first 2008 presidential candidate to embrace text messaging -- rival John Edwards began in December and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama plans to start soon -- but her use of it signals how widespread the technology is becoming for political campaigns. Many presidential campaigns are now experimenting with how to use the service.

Political campaigns generally lag in adopting new types of advertising or technology, but with so many candidates vying for the presidency, all of the top-tier aspirants are elbowing each other to get ahead -- or at least not get left behind. They're posting videos on YouTube, creating profiles on social-networking sites like MySpace and Facebook and posting messages on blogs.

"It's definitely a great way for people to communicate and get information," said Peter Daou, Internet director for the Clinton campaign. "Our philosophy and guiding principle is that technology is a means for people to get information...the key thing is to get people information and get them involved in the campaign."

The Edwards camp began experimenting with text messaging last year, shortly after he announced his intention to run. The campaign began building a database of cellphone numbers by asking supporters to sign up via Mr. Edwards's Web site and at campaign events. They're now exploring other ways to get people involved, like multiple-choice text-message polls. "This isn't a top down, one-way message-moving tool. This is a way for people to begin a conversation in a more immediate fashion," said Daren Berringer, Mr. Edwards's national field director. More than 6,000 people have signed up to receive text messages so far, he says.

So far, text-messaging doesn't appear to be particularly persuasive. "It's not as cheap as email and it's not as easy to use as email...but the upside of this is if you really want to motivate your hard-core supporters, then you're using a tool that's with them all the time," says Julie Barko Germany, deputy

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