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MOBILE DATABASE · REPORT

CCPMP

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Ken Banks offers coaching, mentoring and strategy support.

SMS & Mobile Technology Community of Practice

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Introduction

A community to discuss ideas and developments around using mobile phones and text messaging (SMS) to support the work of the production and marketing teams. Our future work will build on work we have completed to date developing the Electronic Marketing Communication Project (EMCS). This project is described in more detail below in an evaluation report written by Steve Gniel.

New Project (FrontlineSMS)

In our new project we will be using the FrontlineSMS system to support both our production and marketing work. FrontlineSMS is free software that uses a computer (i.e.laptop) and GSM modem (i.e. mobile phone) to create a SMS communications hub. The program enables users to send and receive text messages and allows auto reply services to be created - what we referred to as Information On Demand in our previous work. The following list is taken directly from the FrontlineSMS website and details the system's features including:

- It does not require an Internet connection.
- It works with your existing plan on all GSM phones, modems and networks.
- It is laptop-based so it can be used on the road or during power outages.
- It stores all phone numbers and records all incoming and outgoing messages.
- All data lives on a local computer, not on servers controlled by someone else.
- It is scalable. Messages can be sent to individuals or large groups.
- It enables two-way communication, useful for fieldwork or during surveys.
- It is easy to install and requires little or no training to use.
- It can be used anywhere in the world simply by switching the SIM card.

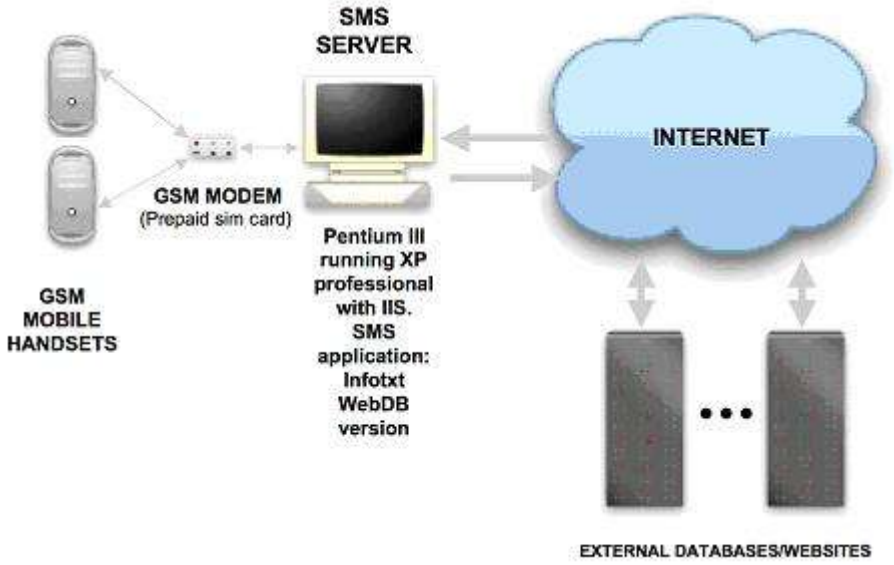
We are excited to be working with FrontlineSMS and we have been talking with the developer, Ken Banks. In September 2008 we will conducting workshops in western Cambodia and begins trials with the software. Check out a recent presentation to see how we have been using SMS in the previous project.

Previous Work (Extract from EMCS Evaluation)

There is a great deal of excitement about the potential for SMS technology to provide marketing information to value chain participants in rural Cambodia. The 85% SMS coverage in Cambodia provides scope to explore use of this technology to assist in real-time communication of market information. The accessibility of mobile phones and the low cost of sending text messages combined with a simple design, such as EMCS, appeals to participants in a number of agricultural product value chains.

Development of the EMCS proof of concept as part of ACIAR project [ASEM-2003-012] demonstrated that this type of system can work in the Cambodian context. The hardware requirements for the system, a GSM modem and a PC (Pentium 3), are readily available and relatively inexpensive. A propriety software application, Infotxt, was successfully installed as a messaging platform allowing users to access info-on-demand by sending SMS messages. The main challenges in the establishment of the system were not to do with the specific technology. Issues around uninterrupted power supply and public IP, taken for granted in other parts of the world, provided challenges for the project team to overcome.

EMCS Technical Overview

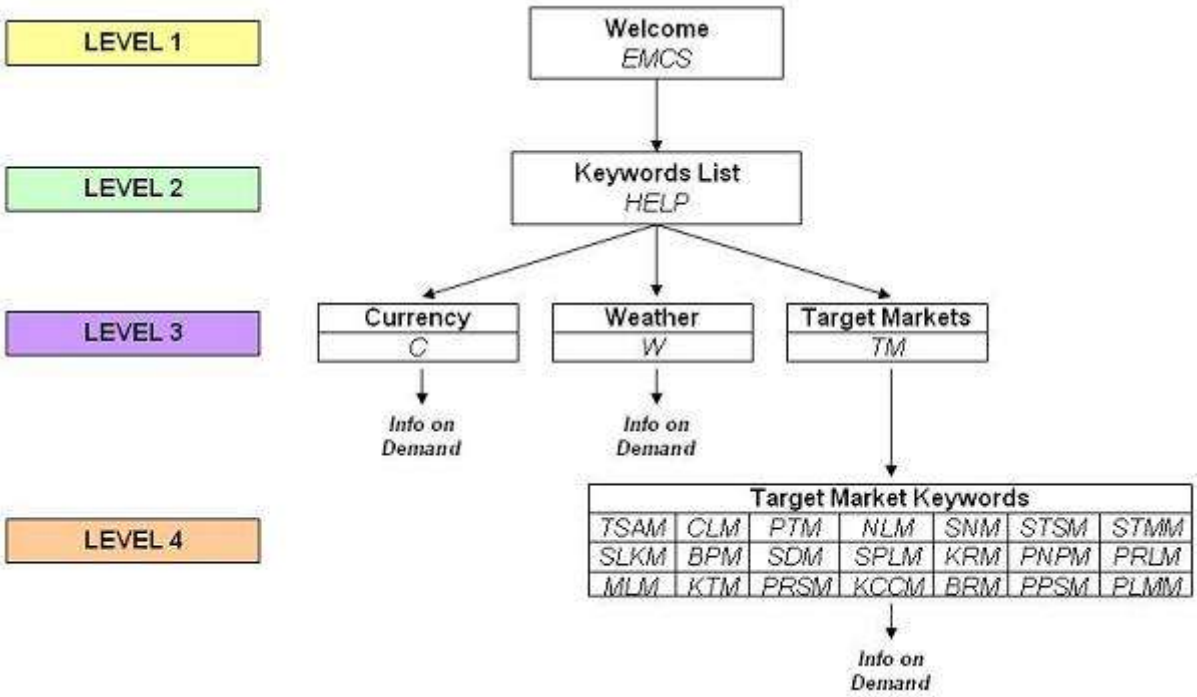


Since the establishment of the system, seventy individuals have been added to the EMCS user list including farmers, traders, silo owners and members of chambers of commerce in four Cambodian provinces as well as a number of Ministry of Commerce and Provincial Department of Commerce staff. Most of the participants in EMCS training and information workshops did not currently use SMS technology. However, as the system is based on keywords and much of the information received is figures, participants believed that this could be addressed through some general training on using SMS technology combined with specific training on the EMCS.

Sample keywords

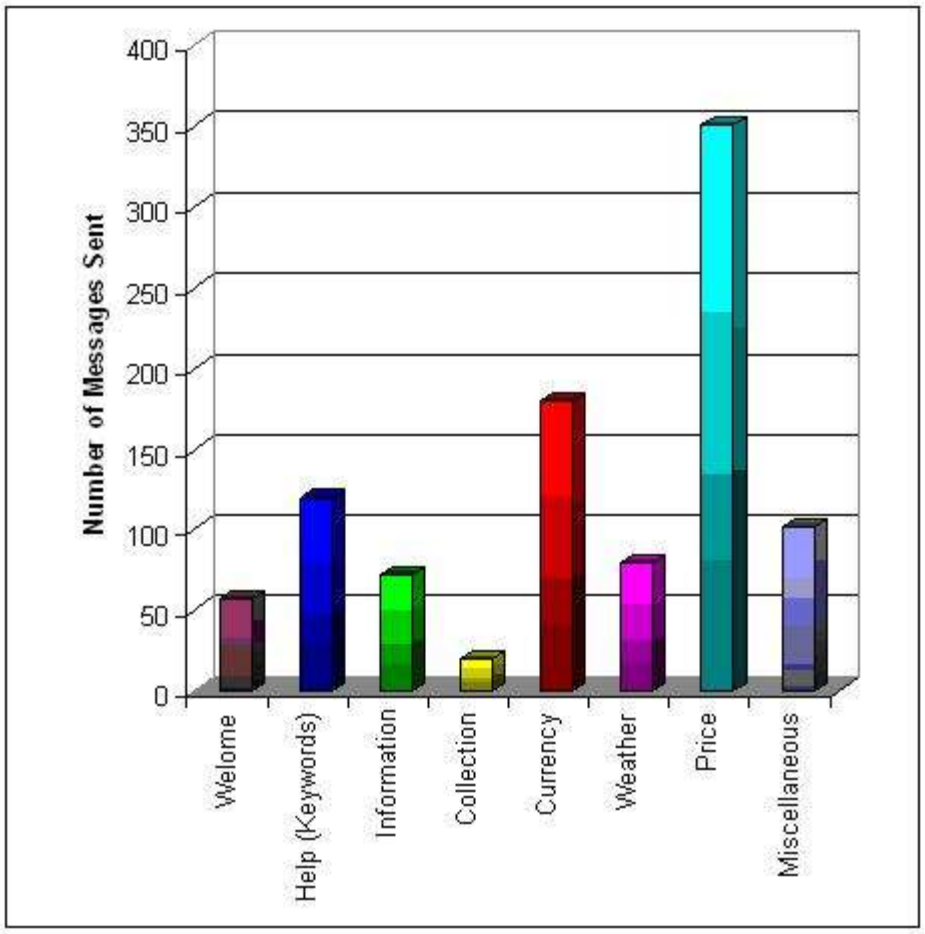
Keyword	Description	From
AA	CAMPIP TEST	Ext Website
BPM	Targek Markek Border Prom Pailin city	Local DB
BRM	Target Market Baray Kompongthom Province	Local DB
C	Currency rates	Local DB
CLM	Target Market Chamkarleu Kampongcham Province	Local DB
CP	Shortcut group Cassava Price Target Market	Local DB
EMCS	Welcome EMCS Cambodia	Local DB
F	Food	Local DB
FACI	Group Facilitation	Local DB
HELP	Help Keyword	Local DB
KCCM	Target market in Chamber Commerce Kampongcham	Local DB
KRM	Target Marget Kamreang Battambong Province	Local DB
KTM	Target Market Kraties	Local DB
MLM	Target Market Malay Banteaymeanchey Province	Local DB
MP	Shortcut Gruops Maize Price Target Market	Local DB
NLM	Neak Loeng Target Market Preyveangn Province	Local DB
P	camis get producer	Ext Website
PNPM	Target Market Phnom Proeuk	Local DB
PR	camis get price	Ext Website
PRLM	Target market Pailin Mettapheab	Local DB
PRSM	Target Market Prey Prosoph	Local DB
PS	camis price submit producer	Ext Website
Q	Quality Product	Local DB
SDM	Target Market Sdaov	Local DB
SILO	Silo Manager Contact Details	Local DB
SLKM	Salakroav target market	Local DB
SNM	Target Market Snoul	Local DB
SP	Shortcut group Soybean Price Target Market:	Local DB
SPLM	Target Market Sompoav Loun	Local DB
SRM	Tarket Market Sroyong	Local DB
STMM	Target Market Songkomthmey	Local DB
STSM	Target Market Stoeng Sain	Local DB
T	camis get traders	Ext Website
TM	Target Market in Cambodia	Local DB
TRA	Trader &Silo Contact Details	Local DB
TRM	Target Market Traoeng Kampongcham Province	Local DB
TS	camis price submit trader	Ext Website
TSAM	Taong Soybean Association Target Market	Local DB
W	Weather	Local DB

Keyword levels



Data from the EMCS suggest that value chain participants and administrators are not only interested in the system but also keen to use it. There were almost 1000 text messages sent via the EMCS from August, 2007 to February, 2008. This included the use of the 39 keywords used to retrieve specific information from the database. Also, during this period, the price information collector began using the EMCS to collect data - 'Hello,Charya give me price of the Maize,soybean,casava .Please .Thankyou.many' (EMCS message, October, 2007).

Messages sent



Responsibility for the server and the data gathering and data inputting became a major issue towards the end of the project. Due to restructuring of the Ministry of Commerce, the EMCS server was moved a number of times and responsibility for provision of price information to be used on the EMCS database was an issue. Two key project personnel, Mr Un Buntha and Ms Man Many, were both promoted towards the end of the project out of the trade promotions area. Despite providing training to the Ministry of Commerce staff assuming responsibility for the EMCS, the system was not operational for a period of time. This resulted in a letter being presented to the Ministry of Commerce about future directions for the EMCS server.

There are a number of challenges to be overcome in the next stage of development of the EMCS. The quality of the market information is essential to the ongoing relevance of the system. During this project quality information was provided through the dedication of Ms Man Many, however the long term sustainability of the system will rely on determining processes for gathering and inputting price information that is not reliant on an individual. The cost of providing the EMCS services became more of an issue once it was obvious that there was demand for the information. In particular, the cost of the return SMS messages from the EMCS server became the subject of much discussion. The cost of an individual SMS message is very low, about seven cents per message, however, this was raised as an ongoing cost that would need to be covered. Perhaps the largest ongoing cost is the collection of market information and inputting this information into the EMCS database, an issue that will need to be addressed if the EMCS is to be expanded.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the next stage of development of the EMCS as part of the new ACIAR funded project are:

1. Explore options for gathering market information and analyse benefits and any possible issues

2. Design appropriate training on the general use of SMS as well as specific EMCS required skills

3. Determine suitable locations for the EMCS server/s.

4. Explore the possibility of charging for SMS return messages and options for the administration of collecting payments

SMS Resources

FRONTLINESMS

FrontlineSMS blog

Database of Mobile Projects

EMCS

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