



## Customer Experience



### **Best Use of Mobile Marketing Relationship Building North America, 2008 Award Finalist**

#### **Strategy and program overview**

Yearling Harlem Success Academy Charter School ([www.harlemsuccess.org](http://www.harlemsuccess.org)) extols the message “Every Child Can Succeed” across all aspects of the school. Founded in August 2006, Harlem Success Academy has 280 kindergartners, first and second graders on its roster, with an admirable goal of becoming a K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade charter school with 40 New York City-based locations by the 2015-2016 academic year.

Harlem Success Academy is placed in one of the poorest neighborhoods in New York, where attendance, parental involvement and success for students were at an all time low. Most homes are not equipped with “current” technology and lack computers and even telephones in some cases. Often families do not have a stable mailing address. Although Harlem parents may change mobile phone providers and handsets frequently, the one consistent factor is their mobile phone number. Shortly after the first Harlem Success Academy opened in August 2006, it became apparent that sending notes home in backpacks, stickers on students, or sending information through the post were not going to achieve the desired communication and parental involvement results. Harlem Success Academy determined it needed a technology partner to bridge the gap and help students, teachers, parents and administrators create an environment of success for the children attending the school. According to Harlem Success Academy’s Director of External Affairs Jenny Sedlis, the bar was set high for the parents. Clear communication of expectations was critical to ensuring a high level of parent engagement. A parent engaged in his or her child’s education – attending school events, communicating with teachers, and reading together at home, makes all the difference.

By implementing an SMS program for parents and teachers to stay connected regarding information, homework, events and general expectations, the technology revolution in the Harlem Success Academy has greatly assisted in the school's success.

After reviewing various mobile messaging offerings, Harlem Success chose an SMS solution from CellTrust because it was easy to implement and cost-effective. Once the program was implemented, parental involvement soared to a record 99 percent, and student performance levels sky rocketed. As a result, the school enjoys a consistent and productive relationship with its students, parents, faculty and administrators. This is a true success story, and a testament to secure messaging and the importance of understanding an audience.

So successful was the mobile channel in effectively reaching the Harlem community that when it came time to open three more schools two years later in August 2008, the leadership at Harlem Success once again successfully utilized the mobile relationship to manage the entire enrollment process. The Harlem Success Academy student recruitment campaign attracted a pool of 3600 applicants for 600 spots. Applicants were asked to provide their mobile phone number as essential contact information.

These families were invited via text message to attend the student admissions lottery to find out if their child won a spot. Thanks in part to this mobile marketing solution, the lottery had 5000 in attendance and was the largest charter school lottery in New York State history. Following the lottery, all of the families were lead through the enrollment process and a series of enrollment seminars over the course of the summer. By summer's end, 600 students had been prepared, complete with uniforms and a clear understanding of what was expected at school, via the mobile device.

The three new Harlem Success Charter Schools opened on August 27, 2008 on time with a strong parental relationship and bond in place. What began by serving 155 students in 2006 has now grown to nearly 1,000.

## Execution

As the primary parental communication channel used at Harlem Success Academy, it was important that the mobile messaging solution was easy to use. “One of the key factors in choosing a mobile solutions provider was ease of use. We needed to be able to create messages and alerts on a moment’s notice, send them to our parent community, and know they got there” explains Jenny Sedlis.

CellTrust’s ([www.celltrust.com](http://www.celltrust.com)) world-class SMS Gateway currently provides Harlem Success Academy with hosted web-based mobile messaging portal that allows the school to expand and tailor its communications program to meet the charter school’s growing mobile messaging and marketing needs on a daily basis. Further because of the ubiquity and user familiarity of the SMS channel, the parent community was able to engage immediately without lengthy instruction.

## Results and Return on Investment

“The return on investment realized this past year has been two-fold,” Sedlis explains. “First and foremost, we have achieved a very high level of parent engagement in all areas of their children’s academic success. Secondly, the mobile messaging program allowed us to become a much more efficient operation. As a school in Harlem, we quite honestly have limited resources. It is critical for us to make the most of how and when we communicate internally and externally.”

With this said, the charter school’s partnership with a flexible and socially responsible mobile software and services provider like CellTrust gave Harlem Success Academy the ability to achieve close to 100 percent parental engagement at all school events in the 2006-2007 academic year by implementing the SMS Gateway. The school accomplished this through regular and timely text messages concerning upcoming events and family academic venues, administrative procedures, attendance, recruitment and grades/homework assignments, to name a few.

## Creativity

With the opening of three new charter schools in August 2008, 40 new schools over the next 10 years, and the addition of more grades, Harlem Success Academy is quickly

realizing the significance and future impact of its current mobile communications program. With a solid understanding of mobile metrics, administrators are hopeful that they will strategically expand their abilities over the next several years. As the number of messages going through the gateway increased significantly, and given Harlem's limited resources and important role in the lives of young children, CellTrust provides the gateway service and messaging credits as a part of its ongoing mobile social responsibility initiative.