



Monday, November 19, 2007

By Kathy Brock

Text messaging growing popular in more age groups

At first it was only the kids doing it, and you could easily decide to just let the "phase" pass you by. But now, it seems everyone is using a cell phone to type messages to connect at work, at home and even in love.

Whether you know the shortcuts or struggle to find the keys, millions of us now use our cell phones to send and receive messages.

"I text all day, every day," said Candace Ridgeway.

"It's just, my thumbs aren't fast enough," said Karen Nasca.

"I'm 46. I just started doing it because people were sending me texts, so I had to reply," said Ernest Posey.

In June of 2000, 12 million text messages were sent in the U.S. By June 2006, more than 12 billion were sent. And in June 2007, 24 billion texts were sent, connecting families, people in business and people in love.

"There is not one client I know that is not using texting on a daily basis in relationships," said Barbie Adler, Selective Search.

Adler is a professional matchmaker. She says if you're dating and don't text, you'd better learn.

"It's a great addendum to the phone. It's a great way to build momentum before a date, stay connected throughout the day. It's a great way to be flirty and playful," she said.

Twenty-three-year-old Rena Malvars has been with her boyfriend a year. Their first real communication was a text.

"Texting, you can stare at it and actually screen it before you actually send it out, calling, you say it and you can't take it back," she said.

Northwestern University psychiatrist Alexander Obolsky says texting can be a useful relationship tool.

"People who may not have been as socially outgoing because they are worried about how people perceive them, they don't know how to answer questions quickly or whatever reason... now can use text messaging and have relationships," he said.

At Condell Medical Center in Libertyville, text messaging is used for patient communication and security. An infant ankle monitor is one example. If someone tries to take a baby from the nursery, a nurse is alerted by text on her phone. And a push of the call light sends a text from patient to nurse.

"We know what the patient wants before we walk into the room, so we are able to knock out two birds with one stone," said Nikki Spangle - Condell Medical Center.

Texting is big business.

"We thought wireless, you know. Mobile's gonna be big," said Jack Philbin, Vibes Media.

Philbin was right. He co-owns Vibes Media -- a multi million dollar company that runs radio and TV promotions through text messaging.

"The more mature demographics are definitely starting to pick it up. It's becoming a popular way for parents to get in touch with kids, but it's just its practical," he said.

Just ask Gina Rice. She's back in the workforce after four years at home. She works for an Internet babysitting firm, Sittercity, and says texting keeps her connected with her own sitter and kids.

"It's a really great way for parents to know where their kids are all the time without it being thought of an emergency or disruptive to your business day," Rice said.

Sixty-five percent of parents who text say they now communicate with their kids more.

"If a child is text messaging and very comfortable and the parent is able to do it, why not?" said Dr. Obolsky.

Not only are more people texting, but more people than ever are using cell phones in general. Just a few days ago, the total number of wireless subscribers in America officially passed the 250 million mark to reach an all-time high. In the past ten years, the number of wireless subscribers in the U.S. has jumped 352 percent.