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DIALING IT UP WITH SAYNOW

April 04, 2008

SayNow Helps Stars And Devotees Keep In Touch
KATIE HASTY

When Lil Fizz set up his SayNow account, then put his personalized phone number on his Web site, more than 1,500 fans called the line within the first five hours. After five days, more than 5,000 fan voice-mail messages had been left, asking the singer questions about his music and declaring their devotion. Floored by the outpouring, Lil Fizz was able to return the favor to callers by punching a few digits.

The SayNow promotional Internet and phone service—which this month started new partnerships with Victory Records (Aiden, Bury Your Dead) and Steve Rifkind/SRC Records (David Banner, Akon)—enables artists to leave voice mails, text or even call their fans. In turn, subscribers who join by dialing the act's unique assigned local telephone number on its mobile or landline phone can listen to the act's personal voice mails or leave a message of their own.

The SayNow service is free for artists and free (beyond normal phone service charges) for its 2 million users—half of whom, according to director of business development Brian Mandler, have dialed in and interacted with the service within the last 90 days. Mandler also says the number of opt-in subscribers has doubled every three months since the service launched in March 2006; SayNow Stars including 50 Cent, Chris Brown, Ashley Tisdale, Trisha Yearwood and the Jonas Brothers (who have a whopping 300,000 subscribers) are among participating acts.

"Artists love their fans and want an efficient way to connect to them," SayNow co-founder/CEO Nikhyl Singhal says. "If they send them an e-mail or spend four hours answering questions on MySpace, their audience is still just like, 'Yeah, right, that's not really them.' But if the artist calls one of the fans back or leaves a voice mail, fans will know it's them. There's magic around the human voice."

The company earns its keep by selling advertising and sponsorship packages. "For instance, if [an artist] gets finished talking about their last show and about how they made a new ringtone, the service chimes in by saying, 'If you'd like to purchase so-and-so's new ringtone, press one.' Then the ringtone is charged to user's phone bill. You can do that for T-shirts or concert tickets or anything, really," Singhal says.

The revenue is split between SayNow and the artist/label depending on the agreed package. If the parties decide to insert an ad for Pepsi or Blockbuster into the message, for instance, SayNow collects from the advertiser and then cuts a check for 25%-50% of the revenue to the artist. If the package is a ringtone, however, SayNow collects an affiliate fee—in essence, a finder's fee—from back-end mobile content providers/platforms like Motricity and Squared 9 while the act earns money just like it would with any other ringtone sales outlet.

According to the company, customers are clicking through 5%-100% more often than the typical Internet campaigns. SayNow attributes this to the program's ability to gather an artist's target demographic—their most devoted fans—into one spot.

Because of the nature of the service and the type of artists—pop and urban—that largely utilize SayNow, the company is finding that around 80% of its subscribers are teenage girls. But the company hopes to draw in new fans of all types—and not just music lovers. SayNow is courting actors, comedians and athletes to join as well.

Label partners are also finding that the service lends itself to radio—where messages can be broadcast on the air—and even contests. "We logged over 300,000 minutes of messages for Cassidy's eight-bar battle rap campaign," RCA Music Group director of mobile marketing Sean Rosenberg says. "People were leaving entries, people were commenting on each other's entries, people were commenting on the comments of the entries." Cassidy ultimately picked a winner from the combatants to record on his last album, "B.A.R.S.," and called entrants he liked all along the way.

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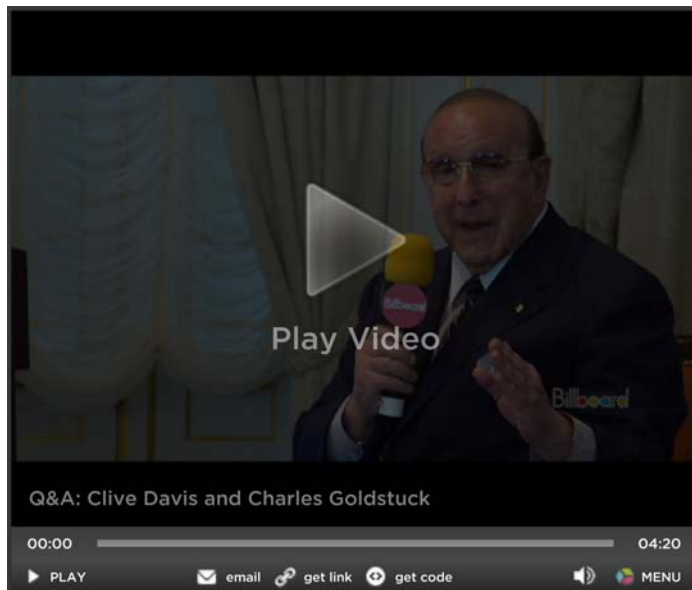
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- Kate Nash

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