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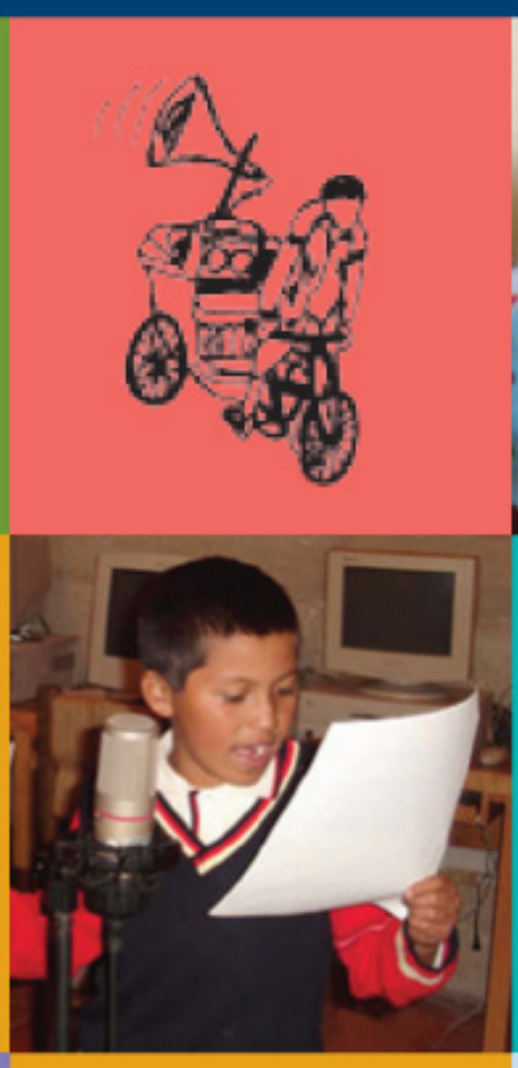
Learning with Community Media

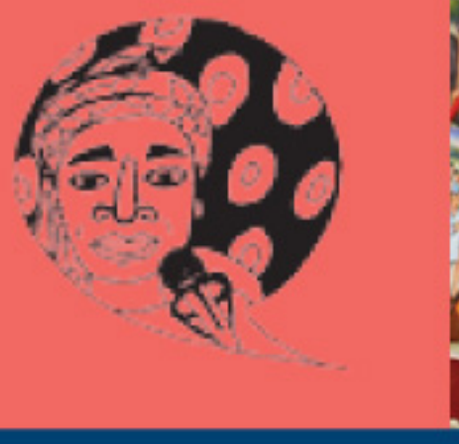
Stories from the Commonwealth and Latin America












Learning with Community Media

Stories from the Commonwealth and Latin America

Ian Pringle, Ekta Mittal and Mónica Valdés, Editors

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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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Tools for Use in Integrating Mobile Phones into Local Educational Programming

Zahir Koradia

Several technologies can help educational organisations integrate the use of mobile phones within local, media-based educational programmes. This chapter discusses four of those tools:

- Frontline SMS
- Freedom Fone
- GRINS
- vChannel

A brief introduction is provided to each of the four tools, followed by a table describing the capabilities of each tool. After that is a discussion on how each of the tools can be used in different activities related to educational communication programmes.

The four tools

Frontline SMS – Frontline SMS is a simple, easy-to-install and easy-to-use tool that enables an organisation to create and manage groups of mobile phone numbers and to send messages to and receive messages from these groups. In addition, it can automatically add a sender to a group by processing the text received in the SMS (short message service). Frontline SMS is often used to send reminders or spread information that can be delivered via SMS, or to collect information from a large group of people. For example, it has been used in providing farmers with information about good farming practices and in election monitoring. A new variant of Frontline SMS, called Frontline SMS: Radio, is specifically designed for radio groups. It is expected to be available in 2012. Frontline SMS is free and can be downloaded from www.Frontline SMS.com.

Freedom Fone – Freedom Fone is an easy-to-use interactive voice response (IVR) system designed specifically to enable community-based organisations to provide information to their communities over the phone.

Freedom Fone requires a dedicated computer, which then acts as the IVR server. It allows an organisation to put pre-recorded audio on the server, which can then be heard by individuals calling into the server (via a dedicated mobile phone number). Freedom Fone also allows an organisation to receive SMS and therefore to conduct polls and receive feedback from the community through an answering machine built into the system. An online demonstration of Freedom Fone is available at http://demo.freedomfone.org/. Freedom Fone is free and can be downloaded from www.freedomfone.org. However, it is more challenging to install than Frontline SMS.

GRINS – GRINS is a radio automation system designed specifically for community radio stations. While GRINS can carry out a number of different tasks, this article focuses on mobile-related aspects of the tool. In contrast to Freedom Fone, in which a caller talks to a computer, with GRINS the caller talks to a presenter/producer at a radio station. The conversation between the radio journalist and the caller can be put live on air or can be recorded for later use. Depending on the hardware in use, GRINS can enable conferencing between multiple callers, and the conference itself can be put live on air or recorded for later use. GRINS allows users to build a listener database by saving the name, number and location of the caller. It also allows categorisation of call-recordings to obtain statistics about the calls. Finally, GRINS allows users to set up an answering machine to receive feedback from callers. A demonstration video of GRINS is available at http://tinyurl.com/grinsdemovideo. GRINS is free and can be downloaded from http://gramvaani.org/community-radio/. However, using GRINS in a community radio station generally requires configuring the software with the station's mixing console, which may require a technical resource person.

vChannel – vChannel is a specialised tool that allows an organisation to operate a phone-based channel similar to a TV channel. However, unlike a TV channel, vChannel is participatory. Community members can call in to the vChannel server to access it. They can leave questions or comments about radio programmes or even news about activities in their locality. These questions, comments and news can then be heard by other community members who can respond if they like. The user organisation can also listen and respond to the comments through a Web interface. The same Web interface allows the user organisation to moderate audio pieces heard over the phone and even to download items to use them in a radio programme.

Comparing the capabilities of each tool

The table below summarises what each of the above tools can and cannot do when it comes to integrating mobiles into community learning programmes.

Tool	Advantages: Can …	Disadvantages
Frontline SMS	• Send and receive group SMS messages • Receive Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) • Automatically create a database of numbers	• Cannot handle voice calls • Does not support a pending messages list • Does not allow more than 160 characters • Cannot cancel pending messages • Cannot conduct polls
Freedom Fone	• Receive SMS • Conduct polls • Work as an answering machine • Provide multiple recorded audios over phone calls • Export audio for editing • Provide call frequencies and caller database	• Cannot send SMS • Cannot make calls • Cannot enable conversation between two people • Depending on hardware, may not be able to handle parallel calls
GRINS	• Make and receive calls between two people • Export audio for editing • Record all phone conversations • Work as an answering machine • Categorise recordings: caller, topic, location, etc. • Provide a caller database • Depending on hardware, conference multiple calls	• Cannot send and receive SMS • Cannot make automated calls • Cannot provide audio over incoming phone calls • Cannot conduct polls
vChannel	• Record audio messages • Enable callers to listen to others' messages • Enable moderation of messages	• Cannot do anything else that the other three tools do

Comparative applications in a community learning context

How can the tools outlined above be used in different aspects of local media programming?

At the macro level, mobiles can be integrated into community-based education programmes in several important ways. For example, they can be used to:

1. Logistics:
   a) register or enrol and track learners as they join and leave the programme, using their distinct mobile phone number, with applications for tracking the number of programmes heard
   b) remind students to tune in at particular times and to mobilise specific groups as special target audiences

2. Learning materials:
   a) provide additional or complementary learning materials in the form of text or audio to the learners over the phone (e.g., key messages illustrated in micro-stories of learners' own experiences of the issues at hand)
3. Learner support:
   a) provide a variety of avenues for learners to receive support (e.g., by asking questions, having discussions with other learners or facilitators, or being directed to a face-to-face discussion group)
4. Evaluation:
   a) test knowledge, attitude and behaviour changes in learners as a result of the exposure to the programme using quizzes and questionnaires

Photo credit: Jerry Watkins (2010)

Mobile devices help community media to get out of the studios and into community spaces, both to play back content off air in small groups and to bring the voices and stories of citizens to programming. In this photo, producers "narrowcast" programmes in the Bundelkhand region of India as part of an initiative to use mobiles to increase participation in educational programming.

The table below provides examples of how Frontline SMS, Freedom Fone, GRINS and vChannel can be used in the above aspects of a community learning programme.

Aspect	Ways the tools can be used
Learning materials	• Put learning audio on Freedom Fone or vChannel • Use Frontline SMS to deliver key messages and links • Advertise on community radio to encourage listeners to use SMS or call in as a way of collecting feedback and material for learning materials
Learner support	• Use Frontline SMS to send reminders • Use vChannel to receive questions and comments from learners and get them answered by experts • Use vChannel to enable discussion between learners • Receive questions and comments through the answering machine of GRINS or Freedom Fone, and broadcast the responses over radio
Logistics	• Use Frontline SMS to register or unregister learners • Use GRINS to receive calls and record details of the callers • Use GRINS to obtain statistics about who calls and how often
Evaluation	• Use "please call me" option or a "missed call" on an ordinary mobile phone, followed by call-outs, asking what the listeners learned • Ask listener groups to call in to the answering machine of GRINS or Freedom Fone, and collectively leave a message about what they learned

The use of mobile telephony to complement work done by traditional broadcasters is still a relatively new field. The author welcomes any feedback, input and or suggestions in expanding and improving work in this area.

Zahir Koradia is the Lead Developer at Gram Vaani Community Media Pvt Ltd and a PhD student at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. He is part of the team that developed GRINS, a radio automation system designed especially for community radio stations. Zahir's current work involves helping radio stations increase community participation through the innovative use of basic mobile phones. His research interests lie in exploring the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in socio-economic development. Email: zahir.koradia@gramvaani.org

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Facilitating Community Participation with Mobiles and Innovative Solutions

Zahir Koradia

Anyone associated with community radio understands the importance of community participation in all aspects of the station, including participation in identifying and creating programme content. Not only should the community play a role in ultimately deciding what goes on air, but there is great value in airing the voices of people as part of bringing content to the airwaves. Participation as such enables stations to engage closely with their listeners.

In the context of programmes with educational and or developmental aims, engagement with community members provides an opportunity to convert passive listeners to active learners.

However, enabling a high degree of listener participation in communication of any kind (even without the compounding challenges of community media) is a difficult task. In order to address this challenge in a small but tangible way, Gram Vaani designed an automation system called GRINS. Stories of how GRINS has been used at radio stations to increase community participation are highlighted below.

> **Radio Bundelkhand** is a community radio station located in central India. Before GRINS was installed at their station, the staff would record calls from listeners by putting their telephone in speaker mode and recording the conversation using a hand-held recorder. This was a good solution but with several problems, including: 1) poor quality recorded audio, and 2) a cumbersome process to manage the recorded audio (such as requiring careful logging of the caller's name and phone number).
>
> The off-air telephony feature of GRINS has now allowed Radio Bundelkhand to receive phone calls and record them by simply clicking a button on the computer screen. The audio recording is good quality and the recorded conversation is automatically available in the GRINS database for broadcasting.

Photo credit: Copyright: Gram Vaani

Radio stations in India have greatly increased listener participation, thanks to the automation system GRINS. Among its many features: enabling staff to place and receive calls live on air and to make high-quality recordings of remote phone interviews; and functioning as an answering machine outside of station office hours.

Kumaon Vani, a community radio station in the Himalayan region of India, uses the off-air telephony feature of GRINS to record interviews with community members, experts and representatives of stakeholder groups. Facility to record high-quality interviews by phone instead of physically travelling to different locations in the community is a major advantage given the difficulty of travelling in mountainous terrain and the low-budget operations of the station.

The on-air telephony feature of GRINS also allows station to put callers live on air. A combination of the system's off-air and on-air functions therefore allows station staff to execute high-quality programmes effectively. **Gurgaon Ki Awaaz**, a community radio station near New Delhi, runs a live phone-in programme every morning in which it asks listeners to call in and express their views about an issue chosen for the day. The station receives more than 10 calls during the half-hour programme. When a call comes in, the station first screens the caller using the off-air telephony feature to ensure the caller is going to discuss the topic chosen. Next, using the GRINS on-air feature — the click of a button — staff put the caller live on air. Soumya from Gurgaon Ki Awaaz says that this feature of GRINS is particularly useful when it is important to air a piece of content or a discussion as soon as possible. In 2011, for example, Gurgaon Ki Awaaz ran a full-day phone-in programme covering local municipal elections. Throughout the day, they encouraged listeners to call in and report on activities at different polling stations.

Barefoot Radio, a rural community radio station in western India, used the GRINS on-air telephony feature to put a speech by His Holiness the Dalai Lama live on air. They did this by calling the station from a mobile phone, putting the phone near His Holiness, and having the call put through live on-air using GRINS.

When GRINS is not being used to make and receive calls by station staff, it can be configured to work as an answering machine. This function has been used effectively by **Jaago Mumbai**, a Bombay-based community radio station, to run competitions. When callers phone in to the station, they hear a question that has been recorded by the radio staff. They can then leave an answer to the question. Answers are available as audio files on the computer. The station chooses the winner of the competition after listening to all the answers.

The answering machine system also allows listeners to reach the station outside office hours or when the office phone is busy. Gurgaon Ki Awaaz used the system in this way and has posted some of the responses they received on the system at http://124.124.247.5/phonepeti/.

In addition to all of these functions discussed above, GRINS also features teleconferencing between multiple callers, a caller management system, and Internet streaming to help stations improve their community engagement. The GRINS software solution is free to download and use.

More details about the GRINS features, hardware requirements and installation instructions are available at www.gramvaani.org/community-radio/.

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For further reference, see:

- Gram Vaani – www.gramvaani.org