Transcript – Episode 94 – [Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About Mobile and Messaging (But Were Afraid to Ask) with Michael Sabat](#)

Dolph Goldenburg: Welcome to the Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast. I'm your host Dolph Goldenburg. Today's guest is Michael Sabat, Founder of @message and who has been in the messaging world for over a decade. @Message is a technology platform that enables subscribers to use Facebook Messenger as a conversion channel. Michael is a man on a mission. He sees the digital future moving decidedly mobile. That means people on their phones, and he wants to make sure that nonprofits are riding that wave. After graduating from Miami University with a degree in finance and entrepreneurship, Michael worked in software sales for just a bit and then accepted a job with Mobile Commons, and he directed mobile strategy and business development among many notable achievements. While he was there, he launched mobile communications for Reform Immigration for America. By the way, when I read that, I went and checked out their website. I was like, "Oh, thank goodness. We probably have very similar politics using only messaging. Before I talk about using only messaging and what he did or reform immigration for America. You know, reform immigration for America has a vague enough name that I was like, okay, this is either a very conservative group or a very liberal group. I was thrilled to see they were a progressive group

Michael Sabat: I actually had to check who you were working with before I agreed to be on the podcast as well.

Dolph Goldenburg: For listeners that don't know, we obviously the guest is on when I'm recording this. We're going to scrap a lot of it just kind of lodged in our conversation. So, I have to share with you, Michael, that yeah, like, like I, I try really hard to be intentionally progressive. So, when I saw that I was like, oh I've got to check out this website really quick. I've got to check it out. I have to say I was impressed with what you did there. I think using only messenger, you arranged for 1200 house parties and brought 200,000 people to Washington DC for the march for America. I just have to say, doing that only using messenger is really incredible. So, I am thrilled that you're on the podcast.

Michael Sabat: And you know, that was a while ago, right? So, we're much further along, and there are many more things. But that's kind of an incredible story with Reform Immigration for America, and we worked with a center for community change and just this kind of incredible team. This was 2010, right? The story is the same, but it's also changed. In 2010, people had apps. People had smartphones, all of that, but especially for more underserved populations, which is still true today. By far, messaging is the best way to reach people if they're not working in front of a computer all day, checking their email 50 times a day like we probably are.

Dolph Goldenburg: I feel like I'm the perfect person to have this conversation with you because I'm going to ask all the naive questions. I don't have Messenger on my phone. I check my Facebook. Well, first of all, that makes me sound old right there, my Facebook. I maybe check my Facebook once every two or three days. I am the perfect naïve newborn in the world of social media and messaging.

Michael Sabat: Well, so you do have the SMS app on your phone, right? It comes on every phone pre-installed. You may or may not have other messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, iMessage (if you have an iPhone). It's this world where email and web are standardized. Messaging is fragmented and can be confusing to organizations when they're looking at it from a business sense just because all the words sound the same - Messaging, Messenger, WhatsApp (doesn't sound the same, but) Facebook Messenger; the app on Android is called Messages. Then, of course, you have an iMessage and then just SMS, and there are many differences, and that is in the space we're playing. And one of the interesting things that I can bring to the table and talk about is the different options for nonprofits when they start to think about messaging as a channel they want to build on.

Dolph Goldenburg: Talk to me about how a nonprofit starts to build on messaging as a channel.

Michael Sabat: Well, so there are lots of options. The way I would think about it is at the top level, you basically have four options. You have SMS in terms of broadcast SMS, which is similar to email in the sense that (we're just going to do high level and quick right now) in broadcast SMS, the organization is building a list of people that opt in to their SMS list, and then they can blast out messages to those people the same way you build an email list and then blast out messages there. The other thing, and in my opinion, it's one of the most interesting things happening in the SMS is called one-to-one messaging. With one-to-one messaging, and these are companies that really started with Bernie Sanders, (and a company called Hustle is the first one to kind of do this), organizations can have one-to-one conversations at scale with supporters, donors or people that are advocates or whatever that stakeholder is.

Different from broadcast messaging, with one-to-one messaging, an organization can take anybody on their file, and, maybe before they do a direct mail piece, they can start conversations with those people to let them know that the mail pieces coming or before they started telemarketing campaign or for voter registration, but it's much more hands on for deeper, bigger cases where a conversation is worth it, not just the blasting out a message to everybody. There's a ton of nuance there, and we can talk about it. Number one is broadcast. Number two is peer to peer. Number three is mobile donations. I'm sure you remember after Haiti in 2010, every single nonprofit went out and got a text-to-donate campaign, which is text-in. You're adding five, ten or 25 dollars on your cell phone.

The way I think about it is the charge is being added to the cell phone bill. There are 100 different ways to link people to a donation page to do pledging, things like that over text, but a text donation is the charge is actually going on the cell phone bill. Then last but not least, which is also very new, is this idea of what's sometimes called Messaging Apps or OTT messengers, and this is Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp or any of the apps that are similar to SMS, but they're an APP and how organizations can kind of use these newer but still messaging channels.

Dolph Goldenburg: I got to unpack this because that's a lot. With the one-to-one, I'm curious. So, are you saying that literally, for example, if I'm sitting at my organization's CRM and I say, "Oh, I

want to send Michael a message." So, I pull you up and send you a one-to-one message, or is it really more like a broadcast message but you're able to reply back to me?

Michael Sabat: It's both. The way this works with one to one messaging is you might be doing an event like the People's Climate March or some local event or rally or what happened in Parkland, and a big one would be Moms Demand Action. After Parkland, they took everybody in their database from Florida, and they had thousands of one-to-one conversations. In the software behind these one-to-one conversations, the conversation is manual and is happening between an agent, similar to telemarketing. But if it's happening between an agent and the supporter, there are preloaded canned responses. There are goals, right? The organization might be tracking like, "Yes, I'll be there. Yes, I'll call my congressman," but it's actually a one-on-one conversation, and they're all happening one at a time between an agent and a supporter. It's an ongoing relationship.

So, three months down the road when something else happens or even, "Hey, you told us you were going to the rally? Did you go, how was it?" the one-to-one messaging goal is that that same agent is talking to that same person for years.

Dolph Goldenburg: Got It. Okay. So, the one-to-one is really about the relationship.

Michael Sabat: It's really about relationships ongoing but at the same time campaign-driven along the way.

Dolph Goldenburg: Got It, got it. One of the other questions that immediately pops into my head is, how do organizations get people to willingly give their cell phone numbers to get more SMS text, Messenger or whatever?

Michael Sabat: Yeah. That's actually two questions, and this is getting into the nuance. With broadcast where the messages are automated and where you can press a button and send that to a thousand people 100,000 people, you need a specific opt-in. So, the user needs to say, "Here's my phone number," and they need to affirmatively check a box and say, "Yes, you can text me." That's for the broadcast blast messaging. Press one button, and it goes out to a million people. With the peer to peer messaging, because it's an actual person sending that text, that explicit opt-in is not required. So, with peer to peer, an organization that's doing both, for instance, broadcast and peer to peer, they might have a file of one million people or 2 million people, and they look at that file, and there are 1.2 [million] phone numbers there, right? Whereas for the broadcast and the opt-in, maybe they've only got 10 or 20 or 50 or 100,000 people opted in with those phone numbers.

That's the difference with that strong opt in, they do broadcast messaging, and then everybody else can get a peer to peer message. How do they get those numbers? Just any web form that has been collecting phone number or telemarketing or data appends throughout the history of the organization as that file was built, people are collecting numbers, they just didn't have anything to do with them before peer to peer except call.

Dolph Goldenburg: For the broadcast messaging, how does an organization motivate (however you want to think of them as supporter or prospect, whatever) to opt-in to broadcast messaging?

Michael Sabat: There's a lot. It's like 'become part of our mobile action network,' words like that. A user can text in. Maybe they go to an event, and someone onstage says, "Hey everybody, glad you're here. We need you to join the mobile list."

It's easier to say, "Take out your phone now. Text join to 12345." People join it, and they're opting in when they're texting in. It's easier to do that. Then say, "Hey, when you get home, write down this web address, go there, click the sign-up button on the top right, and fill out all your information." So, from the broadcast perspective, it connects well with media or events because you can tell people text-in as a lower friction call to action to get people into the file if they're not there already. With broadcast, you can tell them to enter your phone number here in this form as you're taking extra amount on a petition, and we're going to add you to the mobile list.

Let them know that you know they get thousands of emails every day, we're only going to text you for important stuff. Things like that.

Dolph Goldenburg: Very cool. When an organization wants to get started on this, what are the first steps they take?

Michael Sabat: Honestly, do some research. There are a lot of case studies out there. There're a few key vendors kind of in each space- Peer to peer, a Facebook Messenger, mobile donations and broadcast. There're a few vendors, and when Googling, you're going to find out who they are. I've always been on the vendor side, so really that's the best information. One interesting thing is nonprofits are way ahead of for-profit businesses in messaging. Your dentist might send text messages sometimes. I think about dentists, doctors kind of appointment reminders, these very low impact messages, but the nonprofits have been doing this for a decade, right?

That [RIA], for example, in 2010 for Haiti, 2010 Obama, 2008, find out who my vice-presidential pick is. So, it's really talking to organizations, asking for referrals, asking how other maybe bigger organizations in the space do it, but you're eventually going to get to a vendor. From what I've seen, these vendors just are very good, I always have tried to be. Whereas working in those capacities for like we're going to explain it, it's a consultative sale. We understand this might be your first time. We can tell you in an honest and non-salesy way, this is how it works; this is what you want to be thinking about. Here's how you build your list. If it's peer to peer, these are the type of people you probably want to reach out to. These are the newest cases that are working. They're going to be like a trusted advisor most of the time.

Dolph Goldenburg: It sounds then really like just that: you pick a vendor who's going to be a partner and is going to walk it with you and help make sure you're successful.

Michael Sabat: Yeah, it's tough saying that from the vendor perspective. Right? From the vendor perspective, that's what we've tried to do: explain exactly the options, what works and what doesn't. Within the software as a service world, there is a commitment to get started with any of these companies, but the whole point of the vendor is to kind of help you continue and see success.

Dolph Goldenburg: Michael, we're going to take a short break, and when we come back, we're going to talk about maybe one or two case studies of organizations you've worked with and how you walked that journey with them from being a messaging Newbie to success.

Michael Sabat: Sounds great.

Dolph Goldenburg: If you're a nonprofit and you've got a chief executive, at some point you're going to get a message from your chief executive. Probably not going to come on Facebook. Probably not going to come by the phone, but it's essentially going to be: "It's time for me to go." What are you going to do? How will your organization maintain operations? If the chief executive leaves or as I always like to say if they enter the witness protection program and vanish without even a moment's notice and not a trace, where are the passwords? How are you going to get payroll taken care of? Who is going to call the funder to talk about the renewed application? This, of course, does not address what questions you might have if your chief executive comes and says, "I have a medical emergency, I need six months off." Really what I'm saying I guess is it's probably a really important idea for every organization to be prepared for that exit message by having a transition plan. So, I want to point folks to the bonus break series that we are currently doing now. I think we're probably on episode four or five of this series on transition planning, so make sure you check it out www.successfulnonprofits.com.

Welcome back to my conversation with Michael Sabat about messaging. So, Michael, give us that ideal case study?

Michael Sabat: Let me give you a few. Most recently, I worked with Humane Society International (HSI). We didn't really talk about this. We were talking about text messaging. The difference with Facebook Messenger is, in my opinion, and just all of this is super new, in my opinion, it fits much more nicely into the digital marketing space. The approach that I see working with Facebook Messenger is if you're buying Facebook ads as an organization to drive donations or to drive acquisition or petitions, whatever it might be, when someone clicks that ad because they're clicking on their phone, if you send them to a web page, a web form, that form will not convert as well because mobile forms just don't convert as well on the phone as that same exact form does on the desktop.

Given that 90 percent of Facebook ad clicks or mobile, this is an issue. So, the approach with Facebook Messenger was the user clicks the Facebook ad. Instead of going to the page, we send them into Messenger, and then an automated conversation script says, "Hey, thanks for agreeing to make this donation or support the organization signed the petition. First, can you reply with your email address?" Essentially, the user would reply with their email address instead

of filling it into a form. All we're doing is going from this desktop era channel with web forms and pages to this mobile era channel, which is messaging. It's the dominant app. It's a dominant interface on the phone, and the idea was let's do a Facebook ad that sends the person to the forum. Let's do a Facebook ad that sends the person into a conversation, and let's us compare what it looks like in cost per email, address, donation. Facebook just published a case study with Humane Society, and it's probably best to just Google that.

Basically, we are able to get extremely low cost per emails sending the user to the Messenger campaign instead of sending them to the URL. We beat the cost per email that they would generally get sending people to URLs, and I don't know if that's the case study says the actual costs, but it was under a dollar per email address. The other big stat is that 53 percent of the people that started a conversation gave their email address. When you're looking at people hitting the page and 10 percent converting being a pretty good job, this is as soon as the person starts that conversation, more than half are likely to give their email address. Even if they don't give it right away, if that person drops her phone or goes into the witness protection program immediately, that window to message them is still open. You can follow up the next day and ask, "Hey, are you still interested in helping dogs in Indonesia? Reply with your email address now." This is a totally different dynamic when you're sending a person to a conversation versus a page in a lot of different ways.

Dolph Goldenburg: That is really cool. It almost sounds like what I would think of as almost like a chatbot, but it's just happening through messenger.

Michael Sabat: Yeah. The word chatbot… this is a 45 to like a 50-minute to two-day conversation. Generally, when people think about chatbots… it's automated messaging. When I think about chatbots, I think about the user asking a question and the chatbot figuring out the answer and responding. This is much more a marketing use case where the organization is answering the question, and the users are responding. The parallel is a web form. It's just a different format. But yeah, it's in the same space. I think chatbot is not the best term. So, I avoid it.

Dolph Goldenburg: Sorry about that. I am a pretty much a Newbie when it comes to messaging and all of that.

Michael Sabat: Totally cool.

Dolph Goldenburg: Tell me about a time that you were working with an organization. You don't have to name the organization, but maybe a time you worked with an organization, and they experienced some significant challenges in implementing a messaging strategy.

Michael Sabat: Oh my God. I have a thousand stories, but in a more generic sense with broadcast especially, the challenge is always great. We got this new tool, but you're starting with a list of zero people that are opted in, right? You can't really opt in until you buy the tool, but when you get the tool, you're like, "Okay, well who do we text?" The answer is, well, you need to build a list

first. So, a very significant challenge with the broadcast SMS option is that you really need to bring in marketing to do it.

You want to start texting people; you want to start driving the actions that text messaging can drive, but you need to get with marketing, media events, something to tell people to text in first before you can do that. Another thing which we had problems with was Facebook Messenger…I've done the broadcast; I've done the Facebook Messenger, done the donations, done the peer to peer with Facebook Messenger, etc. One of the issues was you would drive these conversations from ads, and Facebook ads just scale, like immediately as is, as much as you want them to. The vast majority of people would say like, "Oh, I want to sign the petition. Here's my email address." Then people would respond and say, "Wait, what are you guys really doing?

Is this going to affect the animal rights organizations?" "Hey, there's a dog on my block that I need someone to adopt or can I adopt that puppy in the picture?" If you're sending people to the conversation with the idea of it's going to all be automated, you do need to plan for that overflow and be able to respond with people, which was an issue. Obviously, that's not an issue with peer to peer. With peer to peer, you have those people there that are going to respond, and each one has its own place that it fits within an organization.

Dolph Goldenburg: When I hear peer to peer, what I often hear are volunteers are the peers. Is that the way it works in messaging as well?

Michael Sabat: Yeah, I should use the word one-to-one messaging, but the way it works with one-to-one messaging (peer to peer as we discussed) is the digital team can do conversations. It all depends on the size of the list you're contacting. So, it can be the digital team. A lot of organizations have this idea of superuser, super advocates and volunteers that are doing it the way a campaign would have people calling a call list, and then you can also outsource to call centers. It is a very good supplement and partnership and way to work with telemarketing campaigns where if people are not picking up the phone (which is kind of a, an overwhelming trend over the last few years), the call centers can actually be texting people instead of calling them and just getting voicemails that is really super smart.

Dolph Goldenburg: So, if you've got a lapsed donor, and you know you've got their cell phone, if they're not picking up their calls or picking up their phone, you can text them and say, "Hey, just wanted to touch bases with you. We really value your contributions and hope you'll give again this year."

Michael Sabat: Yeah, lapsed donors are a huge pool of where to start with peer to peer stewardship and in getting proactive in doing it as part of a welcome series. Say, "Hey, you took action. You signed our petition, or you called Congress. Thank you for doing that. I'm here. I'm Michael. It's actually a person on the other end. I just want to know, what got you to take action?" Have a little conversation, a genuine and authentic conversation. Say then, "Okay, by the way, we're running a call campaign/ Giving Tuesday's coming up.

We really appreciate the action we took. We hope you'll think of us on Giving Tuesday. Here's a link where you can pledge to get an email reminder." For lapsed donors in front of a call, with a telemarketing campaign that's about to happen, say, "Hey, we're going to call in a few days. Please pick up/ Hey, we called you 25 times. You didn't pick up. Let's text you after the call." If there's no pickup before direct mail, it's to the point where text is the best way to communicate with somebody in 2018. It's the best chance you're going to make a connection. It's the best chance you're going to get a response. It really comes down to the question: where does communicating with somebody help the nonprofit? And that's true. It helps nonprofit and donor retention, turning one time into sustainers, turning advocates into donors, end of year…

Building that communication and relationship helps everywhere.

Dolph Goldenburg: It helps getting volunteers. It helps with advocacy. I get your point, like there are so many different ways this helps nonprofits.

Michael Sabat: The exciting thing is, and I'm sure you see this when you were a vendor, this comes up all the time, which is like, "Oh, I see you did voter turnout for a political campaign, but can you do voter turnout for a C3?" Or, they say, "Oh, I see you got people to call in and talk to their congress person, but can you get someone to call in and pledge?" Communicating with people, getting them to make a call, getting them to show up… it's all the model and kind of transfers very easily.

Right now, especially in the peer to peer place, it's been proven for [Geo TV], has been proven for events. It's been proven there for donations. A lot of it's making the bridge to a C3's, to charities… relationships help everywhere no matter what you're trying to achieve.

Dolph Goldenburg: I hear you. It's very clear that what motivates us as humans does not change whether you're talking about voting, advocacy, donating, volunteering, etc. We're typically motivated by the same things.

Michael Sabat: The vendor side, I always joke like, "Hey, I see this work for the New York Yankees when you texted people, they bought tickets, but we're the Mets. We are all the way in a different borough." It's like everybody wants their exact case study sometimes, but it's just a model that replicates no matter what action you're trying to drive.

Dolph Goldenburg: Very cool. Well, Michael, I want to ask you my Off-the-Map question. For folks that maybe are tuning in for the first time or downloading for the first time, this is a question that is far from what we're talking about but allows us to get to know Michael a little bit better.

I saw from your bio that you are a champion. This is correct, a fantasy football champion. So, you have to explain to me, what is your secret to rising to the top of fantasy football?

Michael Sabat: Yes, I did. I put that on my resume to sort of like a joke. It was the last line. So, this was in the earlier days, but specifically, I was in a [Keeper] league. It must have been like 2008 or 2009. I don't even know. I somehow got Adrian Peterson and Maurice Jones like two years ahead of their prime, and they became like the top two players in the league. It was a stroke of luck. I got them, and they propelled me to the championship.

Dolph Goldenburg: That's really awesome. That almost sounds like when you do March Madness and you pick a team. It's kind of like, "Okay, I lucked out. Who knows is going to beat going Villanova this year?"

Michael Sabat: Yeah, there was a lot of skill. I did have a fantasy football. I was going on at New Year's trip. I forget the timing, but basically, I was broke and going into this New Year's trip to Argentina of all places. I wasn't going to really have enough money to spend. I got on the plane and flew there. It was a Sunday or something, and I landed. Somehow, I won the fantasy football. I'm like super lucky break in one, like $400, $600, whatever it was. I'm like sweet money for the vacation.

Dolph Goldenburg: Did you go to Buenos Aires? Where did you go?

Michael Sabat: Buenos Aires and Uruguay. Oh, and so by the way, I want to say podcasts, if you're listening for the first time, like absolutely hit subscribe.

I think listening to podcasts is the biggest unfair advantage you can have it in her professional career. Not tooting my own horn, you will find experts on these podcasts, and it's just like free information. I was listening to a podcast where Steve Balmer's just talking for an hour about owning a basketball team, how he built Microsoft and all of these amazing people that you can literally spend an hour of off-the-cuff conversation with.

Dolph Goldenburg: I could not agree with you more. I listen to so many podcasts in part because it's professional development. It is free professional development, and it's a great way for people in the nonprofit sector to learn more. Let's talk a minute about your podcast.

Michael Sabat: Yeah, absolutely. I do a podcast all about messaging. It's called The Chat Bubble. You can search on iTunes or visit www.thechatbubble.com. We have a ton of episodes going through what we talked about here, how the Hillary Clinton campaign used text messaging, how peer to peer works, all of these case studies, all of these founders and kind of users of different messaging campaign or messaging softwares.

Dolph Goldenburg: I will be subscribing to your podcast. I am so new to even the concept of using this that I'm like, "Okay, I got a steep learning curve." Also, I travel a lot. I'm often on a plane. I'm often in the New York subway system, and there is no better time to listen to a podcast when you're trying to ignore everybody around you.

Michael Sabat: Absolutely. The other cool thing about the podcast is I say to people, "Hey, message me on The Chat Bubble on Facebook Messenger." Open Facebook Messenger, search for the Chat Bubble and just send it a message. Send us your email, and we'll send you guides and stuff like that, but also, I get a ton of questions. It's an easy channel to kind of like just to ask a question, and I follow up on it and answer it, and that happens often with nonprofits.

Dolph Goldenburg: I think you had mentioned that if someone goes to Facebook, opens Messenger, messages you and ask for it, you will send them a free playbook, *Make Messenger Marketing Channel.*

Michael Sabat: Yes. We built this thing. It's everything about Facebook Messenger, and to get it, you just open Facebook Messenger on your phone, search for The Chat Bubble and send it a message. There's a button that says Get Started, and that's all you do. Then a conversation starts, and we'll send out the playbook.

Dolph Goldenburg: Your Facebook URL is www.facebook.com/ATMSSG

Michael Sabat: Yeah, that's the Facebook URL, and we try to push everything through messenger.

Dolph Goldenburg: Wow. I don't have messenger on my phone, so I guess I will have to download messenger on my phone to be able to do that.

Michael Sabat: It's worth it. Yeah, it is a slick app. You enter it on the desktop. You can do it on Facebook.

Dolph Goldenburg: Yeah, I know that's kind of weird, but I also don't get email on my phone either. So, you know, I'm old-fashioned. I'm like your grandmother.

Michael Sabat: Are you in the witness protection program?

Dolph Goldenburg: The funny thing is I actually worked with someone, and she was insistent that she could not be on our website. Whenever you'd ask her why, she'd say, "I'm in the witness protection program, leave me alone!" We were all just so hesitant to be like, are you for real?

Michael Sabat: Just speaking of these tech issues, I found a client that had dial up a few years ago and things weren't working. They're like, well, "What's going on? It's not loading." We tried to figure everything out, and it turns out the person was on dial-up. This was in 2016.

Dolph Goldenburg: Yeah. Today's websites would probably take a long time to load on dial-up.

Dolph Goldenburg: Well, Michael, thank you again so much for joining us. The last URL that I want to make for sure folks know about is your website, www.Michaelsabat.org. I just want to

make sure that folks know about that as well. They can go there, and from there they can learn about the chat work you around Messenger and all of that.

Michael Sabat: Yep. All of that stuff. That's a central place.

Dolph Goldenburg: Fantastic. Hey Michael, thank you so much for joining us today.

Michael Sabat: All right. Thank you. It was a pleasure.

Dolph Goldenburg: I know that I should message you today's podcast information, but again, this is something I'm new at. I'm going to have to learn how to do it, so for now, head on over to www.successfulnonprofits.com. There you will find a wealth of information about Michael and the work that he does. We talked a good bit about the power of social media today, and I need your help to amplify the podcast on social media. Link to me on LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter, and share posts about today's episode. You'll help this podcast continue to grow, and you'll strengthen the nonprofit sector. That is our show for this week. I hope you have gained some insight to help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment.

Disclaimer: I am not an accountant or attorney, and neither I nor the Goldenburg Group provide tax, legal or accounting advice. This material has been provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to provide and should not be relied on for tax, legal or accounting advice. Always consult a qualified licensed professional about such matters.