

## MSR Case Study



***“MSR did a great job for Obopay! They’re experts at launching a new product entry into the marketplace with the right combination of strategic industry positioning and consumer relevance. And they excel at creating industry analyst, business and trade media awareness and receptivity for their clients.”***

—Howard Gefen, former Executive Vice President of  
Corporate Marketing and Business Development, Obopay, Inc.

### **SITUATION ANALYSIS:**

Redwood City, California-based Obopay delivered the country’s first comprehensive mobile payments service in March of last year. But six months after the service’s launch, and despite sizeable funding and partner announcements, the company and its former PR firm weren’t able to attract much attention.

When MSR took the reins in September of 2006, mobile payments were still the great, unrealized promise—just as they’d been for years. The mobile phone was ubiquitous, but use of advanced mobile data applications in the U.S. lagged far behind that of Europe and Asia. With deep security concerns, a perception that mobile payments couldn’t exist without a seamless point of sale experience, unwillingness by telcos and banks to come to agreement on a standardized business model, and overall lack of awareness among consumers, most analysts believed the market was 10 years away from making any real gains. Getting anyone excited about Obopay would not be easy, and any success in doing so would immediately be met with the awakening of a sleeping giant—PayPal, mobile payments’ heir apparent.

### **STRATEGY AND EXECUTION:**

MSR believed the best and quickest way for Obopay to generate awareness, squash skepticism and secure a leadership position in the space was to first demonstrate industry buy-in. We therefore recommended an industry-driven PR program with analyst relations, media relations with an emphasis on business, wireless and financial services outlets as well as some consumer outreach, and a speaking program to generate greater awareness of Obopay and credibility for its strengths as a mobile payments service provider among banks, carriers, MVNOs, merchants, technology partners, investors, and consumers.

#### **Building Credibility with Customer Use Cases**

For each program component, we realized the value of using a secure mobile payments service that lets consumers receive, send and spend their money anywhere was a visceral one—one that had to be communicated in a first-hand, visual and personal way. Therefore, job number one was creating a robust customer reference program from which we could derive not only user references, but testimonials that touched on a number of use case scenarios, each demonstrating a specific need, and how mobile payments saved someone—a mom, a teenager, a college student—from a dire circumstance. These users and the stories/messaging they generated credibly attested to the ease, security and value of the Obopay mobile service while positioning Obopay as a trustworthy brand. With every press interview and analyst briefing, MSR was also

diligent in securing the influencer's cell phone number, so they could experience the ease of the Obopay service first hand.

### **Leveraging Big Brands to Establish Trustworthiness**

In addition to the media-facing strategy, MSR quickly recognized how critical it'd be to the success of the program—and company—for big brand names to embrace mobile payments as a viable payment option for consumers and a key component to the roll out their mobile initiatives. MSR worked closely with such giants as Verizon Wireless, Citibank, America Online, Amp'd and Helio to demonstrate how each was leveraging Obopay as the only provider that could help their customers realize the benefits of mobile payments.

MSR's strategy to attract business coverage was to provide 'exclusive' opportunities to key outlets about significant customers and partners such as to *The Wall Street Journal*, *Businessweek*, and *Reuters*. For example, with the popularity of Verizon Wireless, MSR was able to demonstrate how one of the nation's largest wireless networks was putting its trust in a small start up company—Obopay—to become the *first* wireless carrier to offer mobile payments. This news was provided to *Reuters* and subsequently syndicated in tens of business publications around the country such as *Forbes*, *Fox News*, *MSNBC*, *Washington Post*, *Wireless Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. In fact, the news was so significant that several financial analysts predicted that it brought down the stock of Western Union!

In addition, MSR applied the same strategy and tactics to its customer win with Citibank where we pitched *The Wall Street Journal* and *Businessweek* under non disclosure about the commitment the financial services stalwart was making to mobile payments and the confidence it was placing in Obopay for such a significant initiative. This resulted in three articles in *Businessweek* and two in *The Wall Street Journal* each of which incited discussion from potential future financial investors in Obopay.

As a result of these PR efforts, MSR was able to generate a level of excitement among analysts, reporters and ultimately industry decision makers that not only put Obopay on the tip of everyone's tongue, it reinvigorated the entire space. Analysts and reporters alike were once again willing to cover mobile commerce and payments with a vigor not seen since the hype of the m-wallet in the 1990s, and Obopay was the one to watch. By aggressively delivering succinct points of differentiation, MSR was also able to help Obopay deposition PayPal as well as ward off new market entrants. In fact, the PayPal PR team contacted MSR to inquire about PR services.

### **RESULTS:**

Within a matter of six months, MSR secured 11 speaking opportunities at important shows such as *CTIA Wireless*, *3GSM World Congress*, *Pre-Paid Card EXPO*, *TelecomNEXT*, *Mobile Payments World*, *Payments 2007*; 65 briefings with key analysts, and over 100 features stories in the business, financial services and wireless trades—including *American Banker*, *Banking Business Review*, *Bank Technology News*, *The Economist*, *Fierce Wireless*, *RCR Wireless News*, and *Wireless Week* as well as featured coverage in such mass market outlets as the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Boston Globe* and broadcast on *ABC Nightly News*. *Businessweek*, *CNNMoney* and *The Wall Street Journal* each covered Obopay several times, with specific stories from these outlets in addition to *Reuters*, *Forbes Magazine*, *Fast Company* and *The Washington Post* providing the big watershed moments that helped the company secure additional funding in addition to important strategic partnerships. Of these, senior communications officers at America Online and Citicorp remarked how surprised and pleased they were by the coverage MSR Communications was able to generate on both their and Obopay's behalf.

***“MSR is a valuable partner – organized, professional and highly skilled in the nuts and bolts of public relations. I really enjoyed working with the MSR team.”***

—Howard Gefen, former Executive Vice President of  
Corporate Marketing and Business Development, Obopay, Inc