SMS BEST PRACTICE

The BulkSMS Guide

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Introduction

SMS messaging has been around for more than two decades and is well regulated, more so in some countries than others.

It might seem like a daunting task to ensure you're compliant with regional regulations and best practices when it comes to using SMS for business, but it really doesn't have to be. In this guide, we take you through the five best practices that the messaging industry associations and regulatory bodies expect you to follow when sending out SMS communications.

If you'd like more information, specifically on the regulations pertaining to your country, **see our Regional Regulations page**. Or you can **email us** if you have any questions.
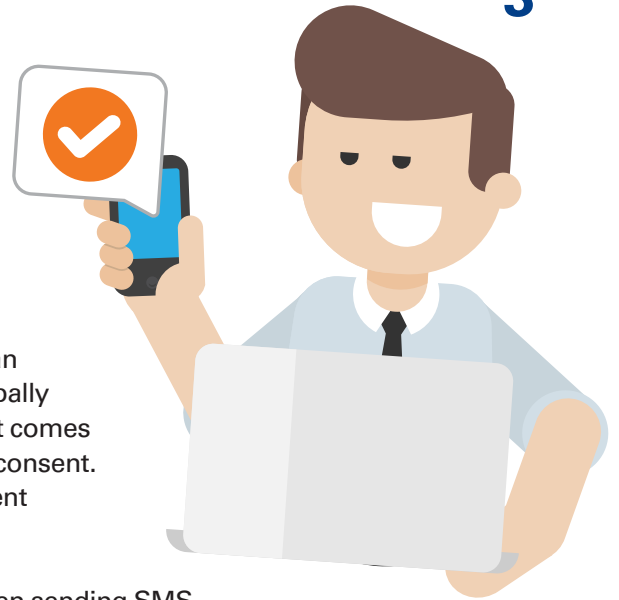
1 Get permission

2 Identify yourself

3 Protect your data

4 Include opt-out instructions

5 Know your content

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Get permission

Before sending your very first message to a customer, make sure you have their consent.

There are various ways that your customers can opt-in: they can give permission via SMS, fill in an online form, or they can verbally give consent, allowing you to make contact with them. When it comes to promotional messaging, there needs to be a record of their consent. A tick box on a website, electronic acceptance or written consent must be collected and stored.

The table below indicates what type of consent is required when sending SMS messages, whether transactional or promotional messages. It also recommends best practice relating to the content of the messages that you might want to send.

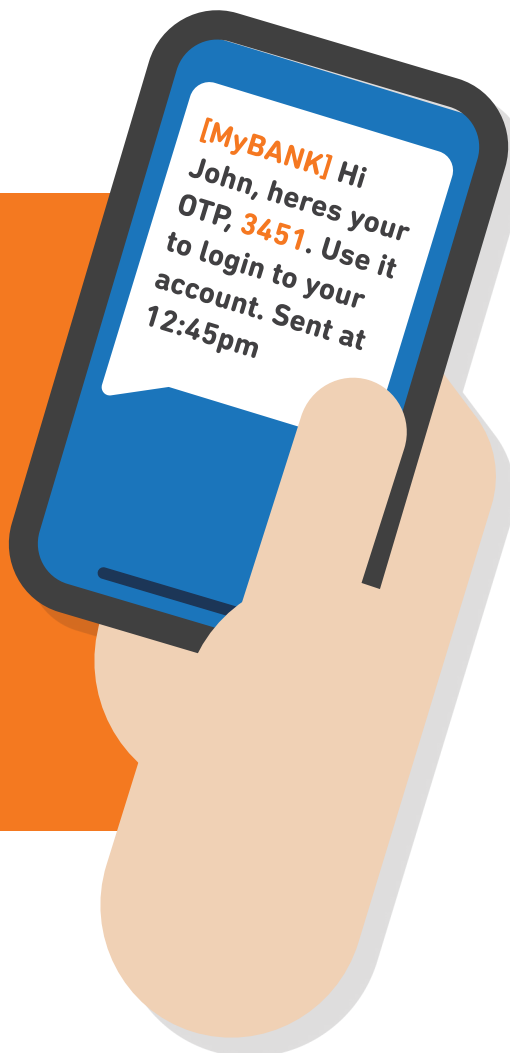| TRANSACTIONAL		PROMOTIONAL
CONVERSATIONAL	INFORMATIONAL	MARKETING
What is it? Conversational messaging is an expected back and forth exchange between two parties that takes place via the SMS channel. **The customer would typically initiate this conversation.**	**What is it?** Informational messaging is typically one-way messaging, where the company or business responds to a customer's request to receive information, or where a customer can expect to receive a once-off response to an action that they have taken.	**What is it?** Promotional messaging is also one-way messaging that offers a sales or marketing promotion. There is typically a call-to-action in the SMS message received by the customer.
The first message... ...is sent by the customer. It responds to a specific request.	**The first message...** ...can be sent either by the customer or the business. This message contains useful information.	**The first message...** ...is sent by the business to an opted-in customer or contact list. This message promotes a brand, product or service.
Example: A customer sends an SMS message to an advertised number. The business then manually or automatically responds to the SMS message and a conversation ensues.	**Example:** There is an existing relationship between the customer and the business. The business would send, for example, an appointment reminder. Or sending a one-time-password. Where the customer initiates the conversation by performing an action. E.g. logging in to a platform and a one time password is sent to their mobile.	**Example:** This would be an awareness campaign for a business or brand. An example would be a brand that has a special on popular items during a sale. They would then send this promotion out to their opted-in customer base with the details of the offer, along with opt-out instructions.

Source: **Adapted from the CTIA Messaging Principles and Best Practice**

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Identify yourself

When sending business messages, make sure that the message recipient (your contact) knows who it's coming from.

You can do this by adding your company name at the beginning of your message and contact details at the end of your message, or - if the mobile networks allow it - you can identify your company or campaign name using a **Sender ID**.

When using a Sender ID, your messages are not repliable. This means that you will need to add your contact details to the SMS so that your customers know how to get hold of you.

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URBIZ

URBIZ

[MyBANK] Hi John, heres your OTP, 3451. Use it to login to your account. Sent at 12:45pm

If you are sending an **informational or transactional message**, for example, an OTP or confirmation of a transaction, you should still include your company name.

If space is an issue, be sure that your customers can recognize that the SMS they have received is related to, or as a result of an action they have just taken on your website or interface, or as part of an ongoing process.

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Store your customer's information securely

We know that there is an increased focus on data protection and many countries are implementing regulatory frameworks for data privacy.

We promise to adhere to the best data privacy practices when collecting, processing, and transmitting customers' personal data (as covered under section 10.4 of the **MEF A2P SMS Code of Conduct**). This means that we advocate for, and comply with, industry best practices and data protection regulations.

We expect you to do the same for your customers as per the data protection laws and regulations that apply to your organisation.
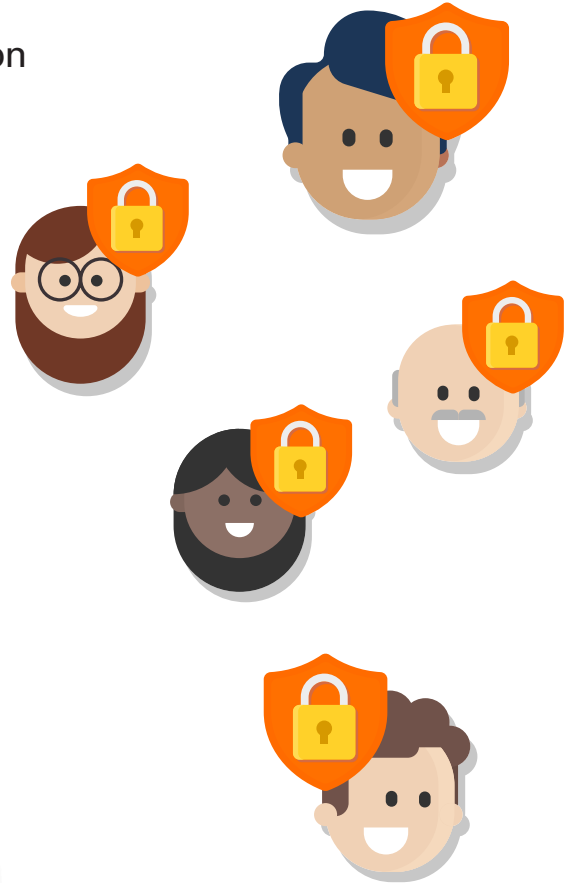
Include opt-out instructions

Your customers need to know how to opt-out, or revoke, their consent to receive your SMS communications, at any time, especially if they are marketing messages.

The **MEF A2P SMS Code of Conduct** says that you should include opt-out guidance at the point when and where your customers opt-in to receive your communications. It is your responsibility to tell them the process they need to follow to opt-out. Most of the time a simple "Reply STOP to opt-out" in the body of your SMS message will do. However, some countries have more stringent opt-out requirements so it is best to check your **Regional Regulations** for the applicable rules. Opt-outs must be actioned as soon as technically possible.

If we look at some examples from different regions, you can see that the **Information Commissioner's Office** (the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals) has a section in their **Direct Marketing guidebook** that relates specifically to a customer's right to opt-out. They state that "The right to object to marketing is absolute and you must stop processing for these purposes when someone objects."

Another good example is given by the **Wireless Application Service Providers' Association (WASPA)** of South Africa. They're a self-regulatory body with quite a strict **code of conduct** and, when it comes to the sending of marketing or promotional SMS messages, they state that clear instructions for opting-out must be included in the body of each SMS message. A recipient must be able to opt-out of any further direct marketing messages sent via SMS by replying with the word "STOP".

We can give you a few more examples from different regulatory authorities from all over the world, but they will all say something very similar: **You need to stop contacting the customers who have opted-out of your marketing and promotional messages.** You need to keep a record of who these customers are so that you do not contact them again. This is best practice.

Remember, if you are sending your messages with a Sender ID, your customers cannot reply directly to your messages, so you will need to tell them how to opt-out in the SMS message. One way to do this is to get them to send their opt-out request to an **incoming number**, which you would include in your outgoing SMS message. Another way is to include your contact details, or a link to your website, in your SMS message.

An example of the format of a typical text message.

Know your content

There are different rules that apply when it comes to the nature of your business message. We've touched earlier on the two types of messages, namely, promotional (or marketing) messages and transactional messages, and we'll now go through these in a bit more detail.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOUR SMS MESSAGE CONTENT NOT:

- **Violate any laws or regulations.**
- **Be deliberately deceptive.**
- **Contain pornographic or obscene content.**
- **Be harmful to minors**
- **Be defamatory in nature.**

Some countries have regulations around the registering of SMS message content and Sender IDs. In these instances, you will need to register your message template and Sender ID with a country's authority and/or service provider before you can actually send promotional or transactional SMS messages.

This is a good thing. It means that when sending SMS messages to these countries the delivery of your registered messages will take priority over other SMS traffic.

NOW, LET'S LOOK AT PROMOTIONAL MESSAGING CONTENT:

Some countries have regulations in place to limit perceived nuisance related to the sending of marketing and promotional messages. If you are unsure, the **MEF A2P SMS Code of Conduct** recommends you use common sense and best

judgement (for example, only send promotional messages during waking hours during the business/ office work week, avoid public holidays and days of religious observance).

Make sure you have a clear and concise call-to-action in your message. Identify who the message is coming from, guide your contact on what you want them to do next, and on what channel they should respond. In some instances, a reply to your SMS message may cost more than a standard message would cost. We have local replies in **this list of countries**, but if you're expecting a reply from countries outside of this list, we recommend you test the reply costs on each network. And don't forget your opt-out instructions.

LET'S LOOK AT TRANSACTIONAL MESSAGING CONTENT:

The rules regarding transactional messaging aren't nearly as rigorous as what they are for promotional messaging. The reason for this is that the expectation of the message recipient is different. Transactional - or informational - messages are typically sent because the recipient wants, or at the very least, expects the message. It is, however, still good practice to ensure that your message recipient knows who has sent the SMS message and they understand why the message has been sent.

And there you have it, our five best practices to keep your business messaging going strong.

Apply these five best practices to your SMS communications and you'll be sending for years to come! If we have left anything out, or you'd like more information on a certain country or region, **get in touch**.

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