GOFAX

The Ultimate Guide to SMS for Business

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What is SMS, the basics

In the 21 st century, organisations and businesses around the world are going through a digital transformation and taking advantage of new innovative technologies. Although SMS has been around for almost 20 years, its use as a business communications tool has only just begun to gain traction – and we're glad you're here to jump in on the action and see how SMS can benefit your business.

SMS

Short Message Service (SMS) or 'text message' is a text-based service that allows you to send a 160-character message from one device to another. Any text message sent over the 160-character limit still sends but is split into multiple parts. Most mobile devices around today support SMS text messaging.

The major benefit of SMS is that SMS text messages utilize standard telecommunication protocols that aren't reliant on data, apps, email servers or any specific software. When you choose to send an SMS to your audience instead of using other channels of communication, you eliminate any obstacles between you and your recipient, resulting in an overall higher engagement and conversion rate.

Brief history of SMS

- **1992** - The first text message was sent - "Merry Christmas".
- **1993** - The first mobile phone handset to support SMS text messaging was manufactured.
- **1995** – T9, "Text on 9 keys" was invented. The first predictive text technology for mobile phones.
- **1997** – The first mobile phone to feature a full keyboard, the Nokia 9000i was manufactured.
- **1999** – The first year text messages could be exchanged between different networks.
- **2002** – More than 250 billion SMS messages are sent worldwide.
- **2003** – Short codes were introduced. 5-6 digit phone numbers used for text message marketing campaigns.
- **2011** – The acronym 'LOL' was added to the oxford dictionary.

(Source https://theweek.com/articles/469869/text-message-turns-20-brief-history-sms)

SMS use cases

From internal communications with employees and staff to external communications with customers and clients, there are unlimited ways to use SMS in your business with many SMS features available to customise messages according to your organisation's communications requirements.

Marketing and advertising

Organisations can take advantage of SMS text messaging for marketing and advertising, using the fast communications method to reach audiences at scale anywhere in the world.
Especially beneficial for retail and ecommerce stores, SMS is generally used for marketers and advertisers to grab their target audience's attention and direct them to a call to action, encouraging lead conversions and sales. When using SMS as a marketing and advertising tool, be sure to monitor your SMS marketing campaign performance and engagement and adjust where necessary. You may need to try different SMS content strategies to determine which method works best for your business.

SMS Examples
- Hi Joe, you must be in it to win it! Check out our latest competition and try your luck at the major prize. Competition closes on 19/07/2021. Enter now: bit.ly/comp
- Mika, buy 4 sessions and get your 5th for FREE at Yoga One! Find out more: bit.ly/yoga. Ts & Cs apply.
- 25% off STOREWIDE at Might Solutions! Come grab a bargain. Ends 24/08/2021. Use code "MIGHT25" in-store or online.

Appointment reminders

Business and organisations around the world lose millions in revenue each year due to missed appointments. That's why it's important to remind your customers or clients of upcoming appointments, meetings or events through their most familiar channel.
Not only will appointment reminders boost business revenue by reducing no-shows, but it will also improve overall business communications and create a positive communication experience with your audience.
With 85% of customers wanting to receive appointment reminders via SMS, there's no better time to start using SMS in your business than now.

SMS Examples
- Your appointment with Dr. Grey at 2:00pm on 07/11/21 has been confirmed. Please notify the clinic if you are unable to attend.
- This is a friendly reminder that your appointment with Blast Hair Salon is coming up tomorrow at 10:00am. Please reply Y to confirm or N to cancel.
- Future First Lawyers reminds you of your upcoming appointment with Greg Narote tomorrow at 03:45pm. Please contact us on 1234 5678 to reschedule.

SMS Confirmations

SMS messages can be used in many organisations to improve trust in your brand, build positive relationships with customers and ensure a smooth customer journey, from start to finish. You can use SMS confirmations to confirm bookings, appointments, orders, purchases and more.

SMS Examples
• Your booking at 123 hotels for 3 nights from 12/07/2021 – 15/07/2021 has been confirmed. View your booking here: bit.ly/123book.
• Max, your order has been placed! A confirmation has been sent to your email. Thanks for shopping with us.
• Thanks for shopping with us, Mary. We're preparing your order. Expected delivery date is 04/09/2021 – 07/09/2021.

Notifications and alerts

Easily inform your customers of time-critical news and updates through SMS notifications and alerts. With a 98% open rate, it's the best channel to ensure your customers are notified of emergencies, system maintenance or downtime, delays, urgent reminders and more.

SMS Examples
• We'll be performing scheduled maintenance on our system between 11:00pm and 03:00am on 13/04/2021. Certain features will be unavailable during this time. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.
• Jessica, your appointment at Times Money has been cancelled. Please call 1234 5678 to reschedule.
• Harry, your flight DA432 has been delayed. New boarding time scheduled for 04:45pm.

Payment reminders

Every organisation that requires payment for service or products (that aren't paid upfront) will know that customers don't always pay on time, every time. Using SMS for payment reminders creates urgency for outstanding payments and helps to ensure payments are always made on time. SMS messages in this case should include all necessary information and provide a way for customers to act as soon as possible.

SMS Examples

• Hi Stacey, your car registration for Toyota Carolla 1234 ABC is due on 15/06/2021. Pay now: bit.ly/rego.
• Hi Mike, invoice 9876ABC is overdue. Please make payment here: bit.ly/invoice or reply CALL to discuss payment options.
• This is a reminder that your account with Alpha Energy is now overdue by $150. Pay now: bit.ly/energy.

Internal communications

For any organisation, effective internal communication is essential for business productivity and overall employee efficiency. As an internal communications channel, SMS assists businesses in providing a way for employees, staff and team members to communicate and quickly deliver time-sensitive information when required.

SMS Examples

- Hi Michelle, there is a shift available for tomorrow at 09:00am to 03:00pm. Please reply Y to accept or N to decline.
- Hi team, please remember our scheduled meeting this afternoon at 3:30pm in the board room. Don't forget your notes. Meeting topic: marketing campaign.
- Please welcome Sarah Frutal to the team! Sarah will be heading up our operations moving forward. Glad to have you on board.

SMS delivery methods

Think that sending an SMS text message is only possible from your mobile device? Think again. While this may still be the best delivery method for individual contacts and private conversations with friends and family, when you're using SMS in your organisation to send and receive messages in bulk, you'll need to find a new way that works.

Not only is delivery method important for how your business works, it's also important for compliance and security. By sending an SMS through any of the below delivery methods, your SMS will be covered by encryptions – to ensure your business always meets compliance standards and regulations across any industry.

There are four ways in which you can send secure and compliant SMS messages; through your web browser, by email, by API integration or by using the app.

Secure web portal

Have complete access your SMS communications via a secure, user-friendly web portal. Compatible on any device with an internet connection, you can login to your account on any web browser and start sending and receiving instantly.

View sent and received SMS in real-time through the dashboard and have access to all features including SMS broadcast, 2-way SMS, dedicated virtual mobile numbers and more. The secure web portal is a great, versatile option for organisations that need access to send and receive SMS communications from anywhere.

Email to SMS

Email to SMS provides organisations with the ability to easily send and receive SMS text message directly through your existing email client. With no additional software or hardware installations required, email to SMS communications is a simple way to send SMS without ever leaving your inbox.

Empower employees or team members to conveniently send and receive SMS through email with an unlimited number of email senders. Simply add their email address to the list, allow time for verification and they'll be sending email to SMS within minutes.

API integration

Application Programming Interface (API) integration is a software intermediary that provides your organisation with the flexibility to send and receive SMS messages from the comfort of your existing business systems or software.

Easily implement SMS sending and receiving functionality into your workflows by using a developer-friendly SMS API integration. With business-grade reliability, security and compliance, you can start sending SMS in minutes with instant deployment.

Mobile, tablet & desktop app

Need to send SMS while on-the-go, at the office or at home? The mobile, tablet and desktop app provides your organisation with the flexibility to manage your business communications from anywhere, on any device.

Seamlessly connect with customers while on-the-move by sending SMS messages from the palm of your hand. Have access to major features including quick SMS, SMS broadcast, contacts management, custom fields and more.

SMS key features

2-way SMS

Build instant connections with customers through 2-way SMS. Use 2-way SMS to send and receive SMS text messages, track and manage replies from customers and action straight away.

With only 13% of businesses allowing for customers to respond to their SMS messages, it's time to make the most of 2-way SMS communications in your organisation. Streamline business processes and start building positive relationships with your customers.

Customers are 4.5x more likely to reply to an SMS text message than an email, allowing your organisation to capture the attention of your customers straight away. Manage SMS opt-outs and send SMS text messages at critical stages in your customer's journey.

SMS Broadcast

SMS broadcast, also known as bulk SMS or mass SMS sending, provides your organisation with a simple way to broadcast SMS text messages to your entire audience. Keep your customers, clients or employees in-the-loop with reminders, promotions, SMS marketing campaigns, surveys and more.

With 90% of SMS text messages read by recipients within 3 minutes of them being received and most, on average, being read in under 5 seconds, sending bulk SMS text messages is the perfect way for your organisation to connect with your audience in real-time.
From sending one SMS to mass texting thousands of customers at once, SMS scales to meet your needs – for whatever your communications strategy requires.

Dedicated virtual mobile numbers

Never stop 2-way conversations with customers by opting for a dedicated virtual mobile phone number, allowing you to receive SMS replies from customers, clients and staff at any time.

A virtual mobile number dedicated to your organisation allows you to build two-way relationships and have meaningful conversations via your customer's most familiar channel.

Easily assign different virtual mobile numbers to different sites, departments or locations in your organisation to assist your customers in defining the areas of your business and create smooth 2-way communications.

SMS best practices

Opting in

Before engaging in SMS messaging with your customers, be sure to develop a clear policy and procedure for SMS best practices to keep your organisations compliant. Building your contact database is an important first step when beginning to use SMS text messaging to communicate with your customers. However, just like any form of communication, customers need to opt-in and provide consent before you start sending. Inappropriate acquisition and use of a mobile number can result in hefty fines and penalties.

There are multiple ways to gain customers' consent to opt-in to SMS, including:

- Mobile opt-in – where a recipient responds to a piece of advertising or promotional material that encourages them to send an SMS to your organisation's number. Once someone has sent you a message, you gain consent.
- Web opt-in – gives your target audience the option to opt-in when entering their mobile phone number into a contact form or other online campaign. Best practice here is to send customers an email, letting them confirm to opting-in.
- Using your existing database – if you already have an existing customer or user database, you can utilize it as long as they have previously agreed to receive SMS communications from you. If in doubt, send out an email to your database asking them to opt-in to SMS communications and confirm their mobile number.
- Face-to-face – if you run a front-facing organisation like a retail store, healthcare clinic or restaurant, you can maximise your opt-in opportunities by asking for consent when a customer visits your business.

Opting out

As well as opting-in, you need to have a procedure in place to manage opt-outs. Continuing to send SMS messages to customers who have opted out of this form of communication can also bring with it penalties and/or fines. Your region may have specific opt-out laws for marketing communications, for example, you may need to reacquire consent after three months of inactivity in your system. When a customer opts-out of your SMS communications, you'll receive an automatic email notification Follow these tips to ensure you remain compliant:

- Setup an opt-out list to ensure you don't send SMS to those who have previously opted out
- Send an email to customers if they are inactive for a certain period to reacquire consent and provide them with the ability to opt-out
- If operating a front-facing business, ensure your customer's details are up-to-date next time they visit

Elements of an effective SMS

SMS messages are fully customisable to your organisation's needs and can be used for almost anything when implemented as part of your communications strategy. Use the below as a guide to understand the main elements of an effective SMS. Keep in mind that crafting the perfect SMS message for a business in the healthcare industry will be completely different than an SMS used for a retail store, due to the target audience and the aim of the message itself. Due to this, you may not need to include all of the below elements for your SMS message to be effective.

Business name

It's important to always include your business name when sending an SMS to your audience so that they can recognise where the message is coming from. This also builds trust in your brand and for those in marketing, advertising, retail or ecommerce – sets your business apart from its competitors.

Customer name

Personalise your SMS messages so your customers connect with your organisation and feel as though the message is being sent exclusively to them. When sending bulk SMS to your customer base, a custom fields or mail merge option will be necessary to achieve personalisation.

The offer

This is arguably the most important part of your SMS. What is your business trying to achieve with the SMS message? No matter whether it's being sent to highlight a sale, promotion or even an upcoming appointment, be sure to clearly state your offer and add plenty of call-to-actions. You want ensure your customer understands the urgency of your message.

The fine print

If you're sending a promotional offer or discount via SMS, be sure to include a qualifier (for example, how much customers need to spend to redeem the offer) and information on how they can redeem the offer and if there is an expiration date. For informative SMS messages, the fine print may include information such as how to proceed, how to call back or any upcoming deadlines.

Opt out

The final step to crafting the perfect SMS is to always include an option for customers to opt-out. Again, this depends on at what stage of the customer journey you're communicating with your customers and what industry your organisation falls in. For example, if your organisation is in the retail industry and you plan to send your audience offers, you would always include an opt-out method. On the other hand, if you're a general practice in the healthcare industry, you may send appointment reminders which do not need to include an opt-out (as long as the patient has already opted in).

Pro tip: make sure to stay away from using shorthand when sending SMS messages to your customers. Although acronyms like "LOL" and "BRB" are commonly used in personal conversations between friends and family, when using them in an improper context, it may come across as unprofessional and hinder your overall aim to improve communications with customers.

Best times to send an SMS

One of the most frequently asked questions by organisations when implementing an SMS solution in their business is when the best time is for them to send an SMS. The answer is based on a number of factors, including what industry your organisation is in, your target audience and the overall aim of your SMS message.

Marketing, advertising and promotions

For general marketing messages like promotional offers and coupons, sending your SMS message between 11.00am and 2.00pm can be a great time to connect, depending on your target audience. For many, people generally take their lunch break between this time and are most likely going to check their mobile phone.

Sending through a URL link as a call-to-action? It's always a good idea to test your SMS sends to find the perfect time to send your messages. Track opens and click-throughs on the URL links included in the message and adjust your SMS sending accordingly.

Appointment and event reminders

These messages are extremely effective when sent based on the customer's journey. If a patient books an appointment with a doctor, it's beneficial to send an SMS confirmation immediately, then follow-up with an SMS 24 hours before.

Event reminders are also time sensitive. It's generally good practice to send an SMS message a week before and then 24 hours before the event to keep attendees updated.

Informational messages and confirmations

These SMS messages are customised to the needs of your organisation. For example, if you were to send an SMS to your database to let customers know of upcoming system maintenance occurring between 11.00pm and 3.00am, you'd preferably send the SMS to your customers the morning of maintenance performance. Other text messages in this category include emergency alerts, unexpected IT downtime and delivery confirmations.

Industries – benefits for business

No matter what industry your organisation is in, GoFax can help your business implement SMS to connect directly with customers, boost business revenue and improve overall engagement with your customers. To find out more about the benefits of implementing SMS in your business, click on your industry below:

- Finance
- Government
- Healthcare
- Legal

About GoFax

GoFax is Australia's #1 premium online fax and SMS service, providing organisations of all sizes from all industries with online fax & SMS capability through our versatile communications products and solutions. Trusted by over 15,000+ customers across Australia, we're always honest in the way we do business and are transparent with our fees and processes across our entire organisation.

Our team provide around-the-clock support and are always there to ensure our customers' transition from fax machines to an online fax service is as smooth and as easy as possible. We never settle for average and always strive improve our products and services, evolving from a fax-only service to now incorporating SMS. We're committed to the secure and reliable delivery of data, which is why we maintain the highest of security and compliance measures across everything we do.

The GoFax Platform

The GoFax platform is built for business, combining popular messaging mediums like fax and SMS into a secure and reliable communications platform.
Gain complete visibility over your organisation's communications with a simple user-friendly dashboard and multiple ways to use. Send and receive SMS via secure web portal, email, GoFax app or integrate GoFax's powerful SMS functionality into existing applications and workflows via API integration.
With access to advanced SMS features, government-grade security and compliance, the GoFax platform is essential to keeping your SMS communications secure and meeting industry compliance standards across Australia.

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