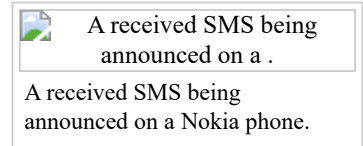


Short message service

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Short message service (SMS) is a service available on most digital mobile phones that permits the sending of short messages (also known as **SMSES**, **text messages**, **messages**, or more colloquially **texts** or even **txts**) between mobile phones, other handheld devices and, even, fixed-line phones. SMS was originally designed as part of the GSM digital mobile phone standard, but is now available on a wide range of networks, including 3G networks.



The first SMS is believed to have been sent in December 1992 from a personal computer (PC) to a mobile phone on the Vodafone GSM network in the United Kingdom.

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Technical details

The message payload is 140 bytes: either 160 7-bit characters, 140 8-bit characters, or 70 2-byte characters in languages such as Chinese, Korean, or Japanese when encoded using 2-byte UTF-16 character encoding (see Unicode). This does not include routing data and other metadata, which is additional to the payload size.

Popularity

Short message services are developing very fast throughout the world. By mid-2004 texts were being sent at a rate of 500 billion messages per annum. At an average cost of 10¢ per message, this generates revenues in excess of 50 billion for mobile telephony operators and represents close to 100 text messages for every person in the world. Growth has been rapid; in 2001, 250 billion SMS were sent, in 2000 just 17 billion. SMS is particularly popular in Europe, Asia and Australia. Popularity has grown to a sufficient extent that the term *texting* (used as a verb meaning the act of cell phone users sending SMS text messages back and forth) has entered the common lexicon. In China, SMS is very popular, and has brought service providers large profit (18 billion SMS were sent in 2001 [1] (<http://www.tymcc.com.cn/news/linenews/export.asp?id=1313>)).

It is particularly popular amongst young urbanites. In many markets, it is comparatively cheap. For example, in Australia a message typically costs between AUD 0.20 and AUD 0.25 to send, compared to a voice call, which costs anywhere between AUD 0.40 and AUD 2.00 per minute.

The most frequent texters are found in south-east Asia. In Singapore, hundreds of messages can be sent per month for free, after which messages cost between SGD 0.05 and SGD 0.07 each to send. The same pricing format is followed in the Philippines where the average user sent 2,300 messages in 2003, making it the world's most avid texting nation.

Europe follows next behind Asia in terms of the popularity of texting. Users in Spain sent a little more than fifty messages per month in 2003. In Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom the figure was around 35–40 texts per month. In each of these countries the cost of sending a text varies from as little as 5c to 25c depending on the payment plan. Curiously France has not taken to texting in the same way, sending just under 20 texts per user per month. France has the same GSM technology as

other European countries so the uptake is not hampered by technical restrictions. Part of the reason for the lack of uptake may be due higher prices due to weak competition in the mobile market - the key player Orange is owned by subsidized France Telecom. However some telecom analysts suggest that this factor has dissipated in recent years and say that the reason may be cultural - text messaging is associated with a fast pace of life and France is more reluctant than others to dispense with its traditions.

In the US, however, the appeal of SMS is even more limited. Although a SMS usually costs only USD 0.05 (many providers also offer monthly allotments), only 13 messages were sent by the average user in 2003. The reasons for this are varied – many users have unlimited "mobile-to-mobile" minutes, high monthly minute allotments, or unlimited service. Moreover, "walkie talkie" services offer the instant connectivity of SMS service and are typically unlimited. Further the integration between competing providers and technologies necessary for cross-network texting has only been available recently. SMS is also typically an opt-in service in the United States - thus sending a message is much less a guarantee of receipt than in other countries. However the recent addition of AT&T-powered SMS voting on the television program *American Idol* has introduced many Americans to SMS, and usage is on the rise.

In addition to SMS votings, a different phenomenon has risen in more cell phone saturated countries. In Finland some TV-channels began "SMS Chat" which involved sending short messages to a phone number, and after a certain while the message would be shown in TV. Chats are always moderated, which prevents sending harmful material to channel. The craze soon became popular and evolved into games, first slow paced quiz and strategy games. After a while, faster paced games designed for television and SMS control have been designed. Classic cannon game and similar are quite suitable for that kind of entertainment. Games always involve registering one's nick name and after that, sending SMSs for controlling character on screen. Messages usually cost 0.5 to 0.86 euros a piece and one game requires sending dozens of messages. In December 2003 Finnish TV-channel MTV3 put on air Santa Claus -character reading aloud messages sent by SMS. Some customers were later accused of "hacking" after they discovered a way to control Santa's speech synthesizer. More recent late night attractions on same channel include "Beach Volley", in which bikini-clad female hostess blocks balls "shot" with text-messages. In March 12 2004, first entirely "interactive" TV-channel "VIISI" began its operation in Finland.

Txt speak

Main article: txt

Because of the limited message lengths and tiny user interface of mobile phones, SMS users commonly make extensive use of abbreviations, particularly the use of numbers for words (for example, "4" in place of the word "for"), and the omission of vowels, as in the phrase "txt msg". To avoid the even more limited message lengths allowed when using Cyrillic letters, some Eastern Europeans use the Latin alphabet for their own language.

In Mandarin Chinese, numbers that sound similar to words are used in place of those words. For example, the numbers 521 in Chinese ("wu er yi") sound like the words for "I love you" ("wo ai ni"). The sequence 478 ("si chi ba") sounds like the curse for "drop dead".

Predictive text software that attempts to guess words (AOL's T9) or letters (Eatoni's LetterWise) reduces the labor of time-consuming input. This makes abbreviations not only less necessary, but slower to type than regular words which are in the software's dictionary.

Innovations

New SMS services offer automated "alerts" sent on a regular basis giving news, weather, financial information, sporting event scores, and other information.

SMS is also increasingly being used for "real-world" services. For example, some vending machines now allow payment by sending an SMS; usually, the cost of the item bought is added to the user's phone bill.

Some mobile phones allow long SMS messages (longer than the abovementioned limits) to be sent. This is accomplished by breaking up the long message into shorter messages and adding some code indicating that the messages should be strung

together on the recipient's phone. It should be noted, however, that this does not count as just one SMS; it is billed as multiple SMS messages depending on the length of the message.

Several telecommunication carriers have recently started offering so called **premium rate short messages**, which through higher pricing and revenue sharing allow companies to be paid for their services by sending a short message. This is also becoming increasingly popular, but problems arise when the premium pricing is not advertised.

An increasing trend towards spamming cell phone users through SMS has prompted cellular service carriers to take steps against the practice, before it becomes a widespread problem. No major spamming incidents involving SMS have been reported as of October 2003, but the existence of cell-phone spam has already been noted by industry watchdogs, including *Consumer Reports* magazine.

SMS has caused subtle but interesting changes in society since it became popular. Newsworthy events include (in chronological order):

- In January 2001, Joseph Estrada was forced to resign from the post of president of the Philippines. The popular campaign against him was widely reported to have been co-ordinated with SMS *chain letters*.
- In July 2001, Malaysia's government decreed that an Islamic divorce (which consists of saying "I divorce you" three times in succession) was not valid if sent by SMS.
- In June 2004, a British punk rock fan was questioned by police, regarding a text message containing lyrics from "Tommy Gun" by The Clash 1 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,12780,1230607,00.html>).

See also

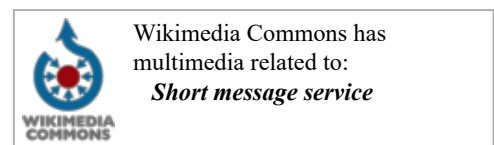
- GenieTexter - Free SMS sending program
- Mercury - Free SMS sending program
- MMS (multimedia - images, sounds...-message service, the new standard).
- Shorthand
- Short Message Service Centres
- SMPP
- SMSSend - Free SMS sending program
- Speedwords

References

- *Je ne texte rien*, *The Economist*, July 10, 2004 (page 65 UK edition)

External links

- SMS Tutorial (http://www.visualgsm.com/wire_sms_index.htm)
- GSM Tutorial (http://www.visualgsm.com/gsm_index.htm)
- SMS Forum (<http://smsforum.net/>)
- Ipipi (<http://www.ipipi.com/land-text-messages.htm>) Send SMS anywhere in the world from your mobile phone or computer (there is a charge)
- International SMS Text Message Service (<http://topup.ie/>)
- TextMeFree.com (<http://www.textmefree.com>) Provides a list of websites offering free worldwide SMS sending
- FAQ on WAP Push SMS (<http://www.visualtron.com/faq/index.php?op=cat&c=19>)
- SMS French (<http://www.globe-sms.com>)
- SMS China mobile phone (<http://sms.ecallchina.com>)
- Textmearemind.com (<http://www.textmearemind.com>) Provides SMS reminders for people on medication and women on the Pill
- SPASM (<http://updatebysms.blogspot.com>) Update your blog by SMS for free.



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Categories: GSM Standard

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