

## THE MESSAGING REFORMATION

# The state of business text messaging in 2021

Text messaging saw a renaissance in 2020—individuals and businesses came to rely on it even more as face-to-face contact became limited due to COVID-19. Now, as we move into 2021 it's time to look at how the carriers are implementing changes to business messaging, what your other options are, and what to look for in a provider.





# Messaging in the U.S.

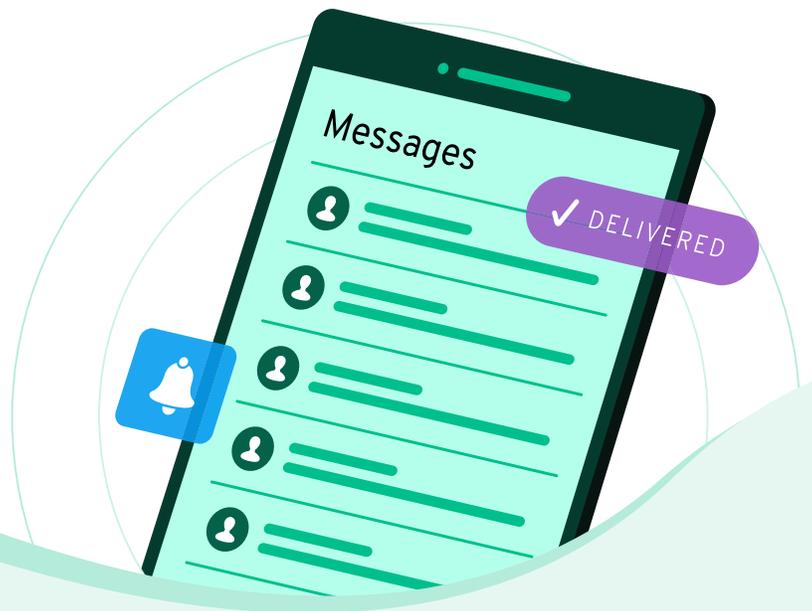
While SMS has been around for decades, 2019's updated CTIA Guidelines, and the surge in the use of SMS in 2020, brought changes and charges from the carriers that are impacting how businesses send text messages.

## Understanding Deliverability

To give your text messages the best chance of being delivered it's important that your business understands the CTIA Guidelines that the carriers are operating from. You can read the details of the most recent guidelines [here](#), but the main takeaways are:

- Understand consent management ([opt-in/out](#)) best practices
- Avoid phone number cycling, often referred to as “snowshoeing”
- Identify your business and regularly include program reminders

Following these guidelines sets your business up for success and improves the chances of your text messages being delivered by the carriers.





## Types of Numbers

There are three (3) different types of numbers you can use to send business text messages from: short codes, toll-free numbers, and 10-digit long codes (10DLC).

**Number types and features**

Type of number	Throughput limits	Voice-enabled?	Time to market	Number fees	Carrier fees	Use cases	Deliverability ranking
Toll-free (1-866-555-5555)	Virtually unlimited messages per second, with approval	✓	Near real-time	\$	\$\$\$	All	High
Short codes (55555)	Virtually unlimited messages per second, with approval	✗	Weeks or months	\$\$\$	\$\$	Informational, promotional	High
Local (555-555-5555)	Depending on carrier campaign status, can be as little as .5 mps	✓	Days to weeks	\$	\$\$\$	All, when locality is important	Lowest

It's important to note that with their growing popularity, carriers are implementing additional fees on toll-free and 10DLC numbers. Depending on your volumes and use case, these fees can quickly add up. Consult with your messaging provider to understand these fees and to work towards a strategy that makes the most sense for your business, including a combination of text messaging and voice calling.

# International SMS

While sending and receiving text messages in the U.S. seems like second nature thanks to how ubiquitous it is, that's not the case outside of the U.S. Internationally, fees, regulations, and technical limitations on number types vary by both country and carrier, adding layers of complexity for businesses to navigate.

This leads to two main ways that a business can send SMS: Alphanumeric Sender ID or Local Virtual Mobile Number.

Type of number	Throughput limits	Availability	2-way capable?	Voice-enabled?	Time to market	Number fees	Carrier fees	Deliverability ranking
Alphanumeric Sender ID	High volume capable	200+ countries	✗	✗	Days to weeks	None	None	High
Local Virtual Mobile Number (VMN)	½-1 mps	Limited to ~20 countries that allow VMNs	✓	✓	Varies. Depending on the country, may not be available at all.	\$\$-\$\$\$ (varies significantly by country)	\$\$-\$\$\$ (varies significantly by carrier)	Low



## A2P alternatives

Because of the limitations on business text messaging outside of the U.S., and because SMS is often expensive in other countries, over-the-top (OTT) messaging apps have grown in popularity in a way that we haven't experienced here in the U.S. These applications can offer rich-media experiences, but it's important to remember that they don't come installed on phones, can't be used to send messages to users without the application, and they require smartphones with data access, which can limit your audience reach.

# The future of SMS and messaging technologies

As carrier fees rise, businesses are considering SMS alternatives to avoid or lessen these charges while still reaching their users. At the same time, the carriers are looking at ways to make the SMS experience more engaging as they try to stay competitive with OTT messaging services. Let's take a look at how they compare. *Note: At the time of this writing Bandwidth does not support all of the technologies listed below.*





✓ *Bandwidth currently supporting*    ✓ *On Bandwidth's roadmap*    ✓ *Not currently on Bandwidth's roadmap*

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## ✓ **SMS**

It's been around for decades and works no matter which device you're using (iOS, Android, Microsoft, etc). The value of SMS is that it doesn't require a smartphone or app download and works across carriers. While the landscape is changing, it's still the no-brainer for reaching the widest audience.

## ✓ **WhatsApp**

The largest OTT app with global reach, WhatsApp is second only to SMS in terms of overall reach. Popular in countries where SMS is expensive, WhatsApp relies on data access and provides rich chat features not found in SMS. For businesses, WhatsApp is useful for conversational messaging but does not support mass message sending.

## ✓ **Verified SMS**

An enhancement to SMS on Google devices, Verified SMS provides an added level of validation to messages sent by a business. Currently only available on Android devices, Verified SMS allows businesses to illustrate message authenticity, while also enabling them to display their company logo in each SMS message. The technology started rolling out in December 2019 and large consumer oriented businesses such as KAYAK are already leveraging it via Bandwidth.

## ✓ **RCS (Rich Communication Services)**

A next generation SMS protocol that upgrades text messaging, RCS enables rich features like read receipts, suggested actions, high quality images, and large videos on RCS-capable devices. RCS brings the features that users like from services like iMessage, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, but is currently only supported by Android devices (no word yet on whether Apple intends to support the technology).

## ✓ **Facebook Messenger**

With over 2.7 billion active users globally, Facebook is the largest social media platform. In 2011 the social media giant rolled out a separate instant messaging application that included features like video chat and audio calling and supports Facebook's new Portal video camera technology.

## ✓ **Apple Business Chat**

Apple's Business Chat is an upgrade to its iMessage functionality to include more business-friendly features. It's targeted for use with already-integrated customer service platforms, enabling businesses using those platforms to have more practical, impactful, and user-friendly conversations to solve issues, complete transactions, and get answers to questions. Apple Business Chat is already in beta with over 40 brands according to their website.



# How to choose a messaging provider

In an industry that's rapidly changing, finding the right provider for your business' text messaging needs is critical. Not only do you want a provider with experience in business messaging, but you want a partner that can help guide you through evolving guidelines and regulations to ensure you're getting the best return on investment.



Provides transparent industry update information with in-depth explanations of changes



Withholds or only provides industry information via support documentation without any explanation



Dedicated human point of contact to ask questions and consult on messaging/ business strategy



No dedicated point of contact and no planning for strategies that align with your business' needs



Interested in co-creation and a true partnership that benefits both of you, integrating your feedback into their product roadmap



Product direction and development indicate they may be competing against you or have conflicts with your business



Practices what they preach, following stated best industry guidelines



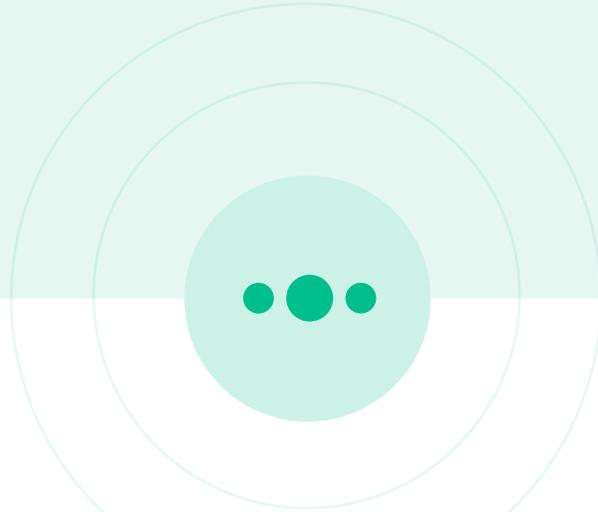
Does not follow stated best industry guidelines



Proactively works to identify and resolve issues before they become problems/ before they impact your business



Requires you to put in support tickets for issues that are impacting your business



### **Want to learn more?**

Get in touch to see how Bandwidth's team of business messaging experts can help your business find the right solutions for your needs. We're excited to see what we can build together.

Visit us at [bandwidth.com/talk-to-an-expert](https://bandwidth.com/talk-to-an-expert) or contact your account manager to learn more.

