SMS in Australia
White paper

History of SMS in Australia

When it comes to SMS each country differs from the next as to regulators, regulations that are culturally expected and otherwise considered "the norm". In Australia messages can be sent using an alpha numerical originator, a longcode or a shortcode, and all electronic messages must comply with the Spam Act, 2003. There are two types of SMS messages that can be sent within Australia, Premium Rate SMS, which is typically used for competitions and mobile billing applications, then there is Non-Premium or Business SMS.

Governing bodies

ACMA is the governing body responsible for ensuring companies comply with the Spam Act. They are the point for consumers to raise complaints, provide advice, training and ultimately regulate the industry with regards to electronic marketing messages. For more information visit www.acma.gov.au

Premium Rate SMS

In Australia, Premium Rate SMS is defined as messaging that is billed through the use of a 6 or 8 digit shortcode, otherwise known as a 190 number. These are usually associated with competitions and content where messages sent either Mobile Originated (MO) or Mobile Terminated (MT) can cost anywhere from $0.10 to $5.50 in one particular direction – for MT billed shortcodes, MO messages are billed to the subscriber at $0.25.

There are onerous regulations around Premium Rate including the requirement for proof copies of advertising, online T&C's which must be noted in all advertising, a toll free number for complaints handling, the process of opting in, content of messages sent, frequency of messages, and opt out process.

Generally speaking, Premium Rate SMS would not normally be used for purely marketing purposes and the use of shortcodes as part of the opt out process does not comply with the Spam Act.

Non-Premium SMS

More commonly known in Australia as "Business SMS", refers to messaging that does not have a billing component built into the numbering platform.

Business SMS refers to Application to Peer (A2P) messaging, and includes messages that are sent as appointment reminders, alert notifications and of course marketing messages. These messages either utilize a longcode, virtual number, or an alpha numerical originator as the message ID.

Whilst there is less regulation surrounding Business SMS, SMS messages must still comply with the Spam Act, unless they are excluded from the Act, either due to the nature of the messages or the type of organization sending them.

Networks in the market

In Australia there are three main networks; Telstra, Optus and Vodafone Hutchinson Australia (VHA). Whilst Virgin is a network, it is owned by Optus, and utilizes the Optus network, excluding the billing platform.

VHA was formerly Vodafone Australia and Hutchinson 3, whom formed from a merger in 2009, which effectively reduced the number of networks in Australia from 4 to 3, remembering the Optus/Virgin relationship.

The Spam Act 2003

The Spam Act 2003 is the piece of legislation in Australia which outlines what businesses can and cannot do, who they can send messages to, who they cannot send messages to and what needs to be included as part of the messages.

What is spam

Spam is an unwanted or unsolicited messages that is sent to a handset. Examples of spam might be promoting a product or a service where the handset has no previous relationship with that company, or promoting some form of a scam in which criminals may be attempting to trick the handset owner into giving up sensitive information, such as credit card or bank account details.

Key criteria for complying

Every message sent, outside of those messages exempt from the Act, must comply with three key criteria; there must be a strong enough relationship between the business and the consumer that would support sending promotional or marketing messages to the consumers handset; the message sent should clearly show who sent the message; and provide an easy opt-out option for the handset to reply on.

Typically speaking, this means that you cannot purchase a mobile database but the handsets you are sending messages to should be customers that have provided you with their details with consent to receive marketing or promotional messages from you.

The message originator should be setup (up to 11 characters) as the business name so that when the message is delivered to the handset, the user can see immediately where the message has come from. Within the body of the SMS, there is a longcode noted in which the handset can send STOP to in order to opt-out from receiving future messages.

Exemptions under the Act

There are two key exemptions from the Act, the first is based on the type of message sent. The Spam Act only refers to marketing or promotional messages being sent. Messages that are informational, i.e. they advise the owner of the handset about something, i.e. bank details, appointments or alerts are exempt.

The second key exemption is based on the type of organisation sending the SMS. Charities, religious and non-government organisations, such as educational institutes are exempt from the Act as long as the messages they are sending are related to goods or services they provide. Government bodies in Australia also fall into this category, as long as the content of the messages are in connection with goods or services supplied by that body.

For a practical copy of the Spam Act for business, please click here

Best practice for marketing SMS

The following points are considered to be best practice when sending marketing or promotional messages to customers. The below points should be used as a guide only but comply with the regulations and legislations of Australia and have also yielded some of the best responses and least opt-out from customer campaigns.

Message originator

The best way to both comply with the Spam Act and market to your customers is to set the message sender ID as an alpha numerical originator, i.e your business or organization's name. Australian carriers support originators up to 11 characters, so you may need to get creative here, and think about the best way to add this so that it's clear who sent the message.

However, using an alpha numerical originator means that handsets aren't able to simply reply to the SMS on their handset. A number needs to be included within the message to receive an Opt out which normally means opt-out rates are lower than normal.

Message content

Similar to certain social media platforms, where characters are limited, it is important to keep your message on point and relevant to its reader with a clear call to action. Poorly designed and thought out messages yield little to no response and could decrease the effectiveness of future communications. It is also important that you include your opt-out message within the body of the message, including the longcode should your customers wish to opt-out.

Opt-out

Handsets need the easy option to opt-out, and the best way to do this is to include a disclaimer along the lines of "Opt out STOP 614XXXXXXXX" as it's clear on the process and cheap on the characters used in the message.

A/B testing

It's always important to test variables, and SMS is no different. Best practice stipulates to test the time of day messages are sent, which days to send messages, deals, offers, and to customers of various activities. You remember your ABCs; in this case it's your ABTs.

Our Services

There are no license fees and no costs for setup, support or consultancy with our services. We can supply you with a free trial as well as advice on how other customers in the Retail industry have successfully applied our services. Our three main products include sending messages with our online application, via email or by integrating our API.

Sending online

Simplicity is the key to our online messaging platform Echo. Anyone can use Echo straight away to send messages to individuals or groups of contacts as text or voice to a mobile phone. Upload your contacts via Excel or CSV files for bulk sending.

Sending via email

Prefer to email? With Echo for email you can send messages as emails, via any email client, and have them received as text or voice messages.

Sending via your applications

Our REST API is the best solution for heavy duty users, who require their messages to be despatched automatically from their websites and applications. Our team of developers have worked hard to deliver straightforward and hassle free integration.
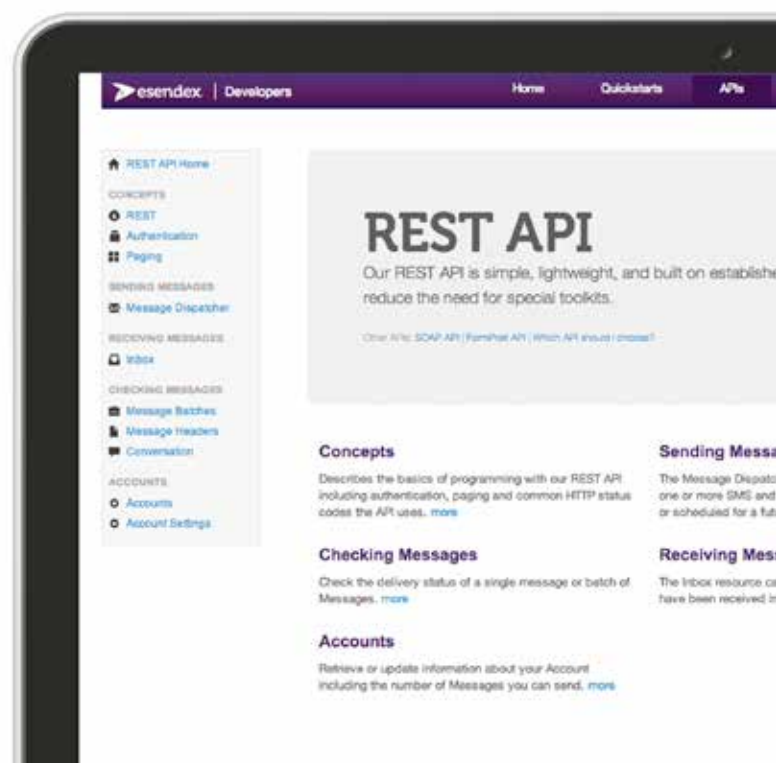
Not forgetting…

Virtual mobile numbers
Receive SMS messages online using an optional VMN

Voice SMS
Send SMS messages to landlines using our innovative text to speak feature

Sender ID
Brand SMS messages with your company name.

Our Services

Available within Australia are four classes of longcodes; standard, gold, silver and bronze and they are classed based on the aesthetics of the number itself, whether the numbers are grouped, repeated, in runs or in random order.

Gold numbers

A gold number is a number that contains any of the following;

* Six of the same numbers, i.e. 111111

* Six numbers in a sequence, i.e. 123456

* Two sets of identical triplets, i.e. 123123, or double triplets, i.e. 111222;

* Or three identical pairs, i.e. 112233

Silver numbers

A silver number is a number that contains any of the following;

* Five of the same number, i.e. 111112

* Five numbers is a sequence, i.e. 123451

* Identical pairs in the same position, i.e. 001002, or one identical triplet in a sequence, i.e. 123444

* Three non-identical pairs, i.e. 112233 or three pairs in a sequence, i.e. 112233

Bronze numbers

A bronze number is a number that contains any of the following;

* Four numbers in a sequence, i.e. 123466

* One triplet of identical numbers, i.e. 111578

* Two out of three identical pairs, i.e. 11341

Questions? Get in touch

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