

Plivo SMS Best Practices: A How-to Guide to Maximize Success in the US & Canada

Inside you'll learn:

- The correct SMS number type for your content
- How to get opt-in consent
- How to craft good SMS message content
- What SMS message content to avoid
- What triggers a carrier review

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1 Introduction

SMS messages offer an immediate and powerful way to reach customers. According to mobile research from MobileSQUARED, 90% of people read a text message within three minutes of receiving it.

SMS messages can cut through email clutter and offer direct outreach to customers, providing critical information such as delivery notifications, account alerts, and login authorizations, as well as marketing and other customer service messages. Here's how some businesses use Plivo's SMS messaging services:

- Retailers send order status updates and reduce call center volume.
- Health providers send appointment scheduling reminders and intake forms.
- Financial services rely on Plivo for two-factor authentication and fraud prevention.
- Tech companies use our SMS messages for alerts and on-call management.

To capture a consumer's attention span, it's critical to get your messages right the first time. Here are our best practices for crafting, formatting, and sending great SMS messages.

2 What are the different types of SMS content?

The industry defines two main types of SMS content:

Person-to-Person (P2P)	Application-to-Person (P2P)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational messaging is a back-and-forth conversation that takes place via text. • Examples might include texting back and forth with a food delivery person or a ride-share driver, or taking an SMS survey, where each question is followed by an answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational messaging happens when a consumer gives their phone number to a business and asks to be contacted in the future. • Appointment reminders, welcome texts, and alerts fall into this category because the first text sent by the business fulfills the consumer’s request. • A consumer should agree to receive texts when they give the business their mobile number. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional messaging occurs when a message is sent that contains a sales or marketing promotion. • Adding a call to action (such as a coupon code added to an informational text) may place the message in the promotional category. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transactional messages are non-marketing messages that provide important information to customers, such as a welcome message, an order confirmation, or a shipping update.

The following two sections describe the SMS number types available in the United States and Canada, and the requirements for each.

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How do I choose the correct SMS number type for my content?

In the United States and Canada, three SMS number types are available:

1. Long code and 10DLC A2P numbers (the US is replacing all long code numbers with 10DLC numbers) — a standard, local 10-digit number
2. Toll-free numbers
3. Short code — a five- or six-digit number specifically for SMS/MMS messages to mobile phones

Internationally, the rest of the world (meaning countries other than the US and Canada) uses a sender ID.

The sender ID is text that appears on people's phones to show who the SMS message is from. With Plivo, this is usually defined by the *from* parameter in your API request.

When someone sends you an SMS message, the sender ID is set to that person's phone number. But over an API, this alphanumeric variable can be set to any 15 digits or 11 alphabetic and numeric characters. Brands love this feature because it enables them to set a brand name as the sender ID.

Every country can be classified into one of three groups based on how they support sender ID.

- Countries that support dynamic sender ID (107 countries)
 - Customers can send messages using any preferred sender ID. But, if the messages are coming through a noncompliant sender ID (such as international numbers and US short codes), Plivo will automatically replace it with the registered default sender ID.

- Countries that require preregistration of a sender ID (22 countries)
 - Customers should register their brand by providing documents applicable to the respective country and registering their sender ID before sending messages. This registration involves a minimum registration fee applied by the operators.
- Countries that don't support sender ID (42 countries)
 - Where sender ID is not supported, SMS will be delivered, but the sender ID used in the *from* field will be replaced with local numbers or short codes or a generic code based on the country's regulation for delivery.

Most countries set a sender ID limit of six characters. Certain countries allow six to 11 characters. [Check here to view the list of characters by country.](#)

SMS Content Type Key Takeaways

- It is important to match your content to an approved SMS number type.
- Each SMS number type has different requirements for opt-in consent from the end user.

Use the table below as a quick reference for which SMS number type to choose for your content.

	Long Code	Toll-free	Short Code
Approved Content	Person-to-Person *10DLC A2P (AT&T and Verizon)	Person-to-Person Application-to-Person	Person-to-Person Application-to-Person Promotional
Approved Opt-In	Implied consent Express consent Keyword consent	Implied consent Express consent Keyword consent	Express consent Keyword consent
Throughput Limitations: US/Canada	1 SMS per 4 seconds *10DLC A2P throughput is not fixed for each campaign but "trust scores" dictate volume and throughput	US: 40 SMS/sec Canada: 1 SMS/sec	100 SMS/sec
Procurement Time	Immediate *10DLC A2P campaigns procurement varies by campaign type	1 business day	6-12 weeks
Number Type	10-digit virtual numbers	10-digit number	Specifically provisioned 5- or 6-digit number
Reach	19 countries	International reach	US/Canada only
Cost	Lowest	Low	High *Short code fees can be found here .
Examples	Number masking, conversational SMS	2FA, security alerts, order confirmations, reminders, surveys, customer care messaging	Marketing, alerts, reminders, promotions, and event announcements

SMS Content Type Key Takeaways

- Make sure to match your SMS number choice to the content type you intend to send.
- Each SMS number type has different approved content types.

4 How is opt-in consent given?

The sender must obtain proper consumer consent (opt-in) for each message. The type of consent required depends on the content sent to the consumer.

Types of messaging content and the associated consent that is required:

Implied Consent	Express Consent	Keyword Consent
<p>Implied consent is acceptable when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first message is always sent by the consumer; • It is a two-way conversation; • The message responds to a specific request. <p>If the consumer initiates the text message exchange and the business only responds to each consumer with relevant information, then no verbal or written permission is required.</p>	<p>Express consent is required when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first message is sent by the consumer or business; • It is a one-way alert or two-way conversation; • The message contains information. <p>The consumer should give permission before a business sends them a text message.</p> <p>Consumers can give permission over text, on a form or website, or verbally. Written permission also works.</p>	<p>Keyword consent requires the consumer to signal their consent to receive text messages by having them text a specific "keyword" to a number.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Text START to 12345 to subscribe to alerts.</p>

Consent Type Key Takeaways

- Consumers can revoke consent at any time and in any way.
- Consumer opt-out requests must be honored, whether they are made by phone call, email, or text.
- See *Appendix for sample consent and terms of service language.*

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How do I craft good SMS message content?

High quality, well-formatted content is more likely to be opened and read by a consumer and less likely to be mistaken for spam. These best practices make messages more valuable to consumers and are less likely to trigger real-time content analysis from spam filters.

As a rule of thumb, if a message is reviewed by a third party out of context, it should appear to be a transactional, application-to-person message originating from a specific request by the end user. In general, content should include:

- Your company name
- A reference to the reason the message is being sent
- A STOP message

While a STOP message does not need to be included in every message sent, consider sending it in every fourth or fifth message.

Message content should avoid:

- Generic URL shortener links
- The words "Free," "Now," "Offer," "Winner," or any other promotional-sounding language
- Request for action without specifying context

SMS Messaging Best Practices

- **Use one recognizable number.**
Each campaign should use one primary phone number. Using a single number for both text and voice calls is recommended.
- **Use one recognizable domain name.**
Each campaign should be associated with a single web domain.
- **Use natural language.**
You should use natural language in your messages, so don't use nonstandard spelling. For example, don't say, "H! h0w ar3__you do1ng?"
- **Ask for direct consent.**
You should collect the consumer consent yourself, and not use consent acquired from a third party. Consumers expect a relationship with the businesses with which they interact.
- **Set expectations on frequency.**
You should set the proper expectation with the consumer for message frequency. If you're sending five texts a month, then disclosing "5/msg a month" on the first interaction leads to a positive user experience.

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What SMS message content should I avoid?

If a sender is observed sending any of the disallowed content listed below, then an account review is performed. This review can result in the suspension of sending rights for a provisioned phone number, the restriction of high-throughput access, the suspension of provisioning rights for new phone numbers, and/or suspension of all network services.

Message senders are expected to enforce restrictions on their own networks to prevent these types of content.

- **Number pooling**
Promotional messaging is not allowed on toll-free numbers and is subject to blocking.
- **Phishing**
Phishing is the practice of sending messages that appear to come from reputable companies, but in fact trick consumers into revealing personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers.
- **Fraud or scam**
Any messages that constitute a fraud or scam, which involves wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain, are prohibited. These messages generally involve money and/or some sort of business transaction.
- **Deceptive marketing**
Marketing messages must be truthful, not misleading, and, when appropriate, backed by scientific evidence in order to meet the standard held by the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Truth In Advertising rules. The FTC prohibits unfair or deceptive advertising in any medium, including text messages.

- **S.H.A.F.T.**

S.H.A.F.T. stands for sex, hate, alcohol, firearms, and tobacco. Any message content containing terms specific to any S.H.A.F.T. content is strictly forbidden on any number type, and may result in blocking.

- **Sensitive content**

Messages that contain terms related to the following sensitive topics are inspected closely and can be more susceptible to carrier blocking:

- Betting-related content — game bet, lucky draw, etc.
- Debt restructuring/refinancing offers
- Debt relief offers
- Payday loan offers
- Home loan offers
- Education loan offers
- Insurance quotes (unsolicited)
- Earn money from home job offers

SMS Content to avoid: Key Takeaways

- Our carriers continuously monitor text messages traversing their networks.
- As a practice, the carrier does not preapprove or whitelist messaging content, but may review any message content as part of an account review.
- Content flagged by automatic spam detection algorithms is then reviewed by a human operator.
- If the human operator perceives the message as promotional, the sending number may be blocked by the operator platform and the customer/brand sending such content will be added to a global blacklist, causing reduced throughput approval on 10DLC numbers by end operators.

7 What actions might trigger a carrier review?

In addition to reviewing messages for disallowed content, carriers are also monitoring for disallowed sending practices. If a message sender is observed performing any of the disallowed sending practices that are listed below, then an account review is performed by the carrier. This review can result in the suspension of sending rights for a provisioned phone number, the restriction of high-throughput access, the suspension of provisioning rights for new phone numbers, and/or the suspension of all network services.

- **Continued sending to opted-out consumers**
 - When a consumer opts out, they should no longer receive messages from that message sender. If they do receive messages, then it's likely that the opt-out event was either not processed or processed incorrectly within the message sender's network.
- **Opt-out avoidance**
 - If a consumer opts out of communications with a business, then disregarding the consumer's opt-out and sending a message from a new phone number from the same business is not allowed.
- **Daily opt-out rate**
 - The daily opt-out rate on a phone number is defined as the total number of unique consumer phone numbers divided by the unique opted-out consumers that were sent messages within a 24-hour period.
 - If the daily opt-out rate on a sending phone number is 5% or greater, then the account is flagged for monitoring. An opt-out rate of 10% or greater on a sending phone number may result in immediate suspension of services.

- **Snowshoe sending (applies to toll-free numbers only)**
 - Snowshoe sending is a technique used to spread messages across many source phone numbers, specifically to dilute reputation metrics and evade filters. Carriers actively monitor for snowshoe sending. If they discover snowshoeing, then the sending phone numbers may have their sending rights suspended.
 - If your messaging use case requires the use of multiple numbers to distribute “similar” or “like” content, then you should inform the carrier of the phone numbers ahead of time to have them excluded from this monitoring.
- **URL cycling**
 - This practice is defined as the utilization of multiple destination URLs on the same message content for the specific purpose of diluting reputation metrics and evading filters. URL cycling does not include the use of unique “personal” links to give a consumer custom content via a URL shortener or other means, which is allowed.

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How do I get started with SMS messaging from Plivo?

Message formats, carrier rules, country rules, spam — it sounds complicated, but Plivo's expertise as an SMS platform provider offers you both the technology solutions and the guidance you need. Now that you know how to maximize your SMS messages across the globe, it's time to put these best practices to use and get started with Plivo's SMS API.

Log in to your account or sign up today!

[LOG IN](#)[SIGN UP](#)

Appendix: Sample Consent Language & Disallowed Sending Practices

- **Sample Express Consent Language (Opt-In)**



Please note: The content samples below apply to long code and toll-free numbers. Short codes have more exact opt-in language requirements. Please contact us for more information on short codes.

"By (signing here/clicking this check box) I give my express consent to receive transactional SMS text messages to my phone."

We also recommend setting expectations around the frequency of messaging. For example: "We will send you a maximum of 1 message per day." "Average 3 messages per day."

- **Revoking Consent (Opt-Out)**

A STOP request should block all text message exchanges between a source number and a destination number. Note that Plivo automatically places a temporary 90-day block on a number pair when a STOP request is received. A consumer can opt back in at any time by replying with the keyword UNSTOP.

- **Consumer Notification**

It is a best practice to notify the consumer of their ability to opt out from future messages from the sender. For example, include the sentence "Reply STOP to unsubscribe" at the end of the initial message sent to the consumer. We recommend sending this communication every fifth message for continued consumer awareness.

- **Opt Out Key Words & Messages**

A consumer can opt out of communication with any sender by texting the keyword "STOP" to the sender's phone number. The keyword is not case-sensitive and triggers an opt-out only when sent as a single word with no punctuation or leading spaces (any trailing spaces are trimmed). If the consumer uses the opt-out keyword within a sentence, then an opt-out is not triggered.

- **Examples of valid opt-out messages:**

"STOP"

"Stop"

"stop"

"STop"

- **Examples of invalid opt-out messages:**

"Hey can you stop texting me?"

"Stop it!"

The opt-out confirmation message returned to a consumer is generic and gives instructions on how to opt back into service again with the message sender's phone number.

- **Example of opt-out confirmation message:**

NETWORK MSG: You replied with the word "STOP" which blocks all texts sent from this number. Text back "UNSTOP" to receive messages again.

- **Opt-In Keywords & Messages**

A consumer can opt back in at any time to receive messages by texting the keyword "UNSTOP" to a sender's phone number. The keyword is not case-sensitive and triggers an opt-in only when sent as a single word, with no punctuation or leading spaces (any trailing spaces are trimmed). If the consumer uses the opt-in keyword within a sentence an opt-in is not triggered.

- **Examples of valid opt-ins:**

"UNSTOP"

"Unstop"

"unstop"

"UNStop"

- **Examples of invalid opt-ins:**

“Hey can you enable me again”

“Unstop me!”

The message returned to a consumer is generic and informs the consumer they can start two-way texting with the sender’s phone number again.

- **Example UNSTOP response text:**

NETWORK MSG: You have replied "unstop" and will begin receiving messages again from this number.

- **Notification of Opt-Out/Opt-In**

Depending on their connectivity with the carrier network, opt-out and opt-in messages trigger either an SMPP message or HTTP webhook event to the message sender. This is the default behavior unless otherwise specified during the onboarding process.

- **Expectation Upon Receipt of Opt-Out/Opt-In**

A message sender must act on every opt-out event sent to them from the carrier. Remove the phone numbers of consumers who have opted out from all distribution lists and log them as “opted out” from SMS communications. This ensures that future messages are not attempted and consumer consent is honored.

- **Sending to a Customer Who Has Opted Out**

An error message will be returned to senders who attempt to send a text message to an opted-out customer. If final delivery receipts are not enabled, then no notification is presented to the message sender. The delivery of final delivery receipts is the default behavior unless otherwise specified during the onboarding process.

- **SMS-Specific Privacy Policy and Terms of Service**



Please note: The content samples below apply to long code and toll-free numbers. Short codes have more exact opt-in language requirements. Please contact us for more information on short codes.

When collecting opt-in responses, we recommend adding language to your privacy policy and terms of service to specifically address SMS. For example:

- **Privacy Policy**

“We collect your phone number specifically for the purpose of communicating with you via SMS text messaging. We do not share or sell your phone number to any third party.”

- **Terms of Service**

“We send SMS messages to you strictly in accordance with your preferences, and only after you have explicitly opted in. If you change your mind at any time and no longer wish to receive SMS messages, simply reply to a message with the word STOP. Afterwards, should you choose to begin receiving messages again, reply with the word UNSTOP.”



About Plivo

For businesses of all kinds, Plivo offers a simple, fast, and scalable way to modernize customer communications. Thousands of businesses use Plivo to quickly integrate messaging and voice calling into their applications to deliver better customer experiences. The Plivo team brings deep communications and modern software development experience to address the needs of today's businesses — quality, scale, speed, and agility. Plivo has direct relationships with 1,600+ carrier networks and connectivity in 190+ countries.

Want to learn more?

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