

Plivo SMS Best Practices for the US and Canada: A How-to Guide to Maximize Success





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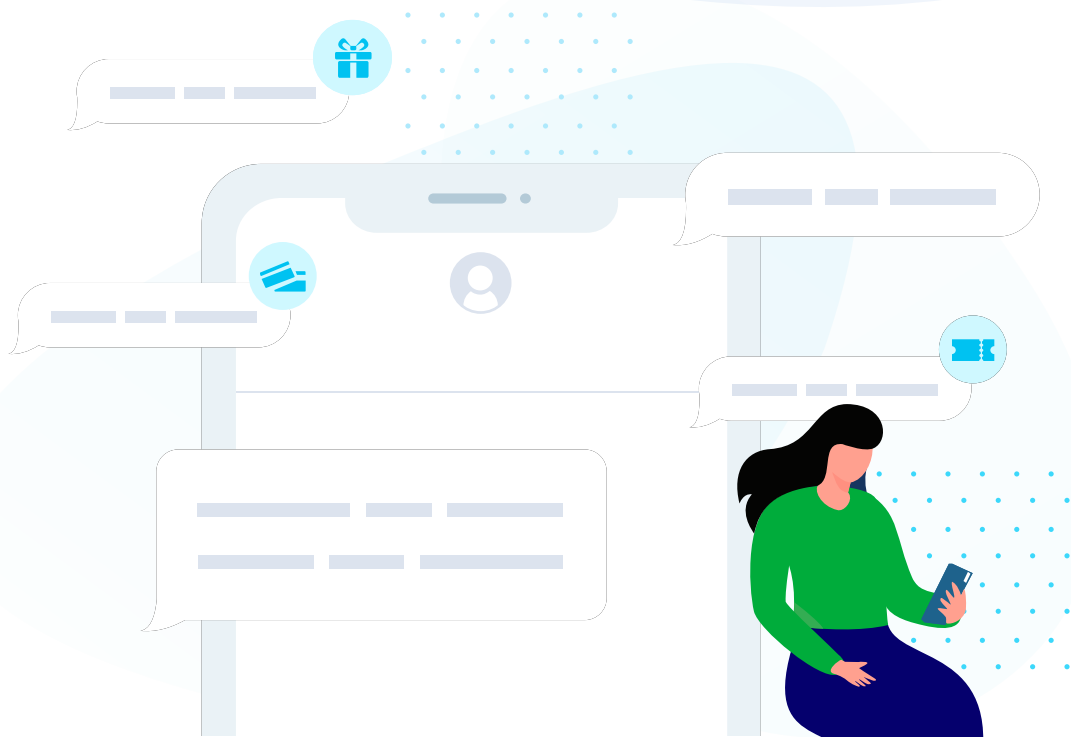
1. Introduction to SMS messages

SMS messages offer an immediate and powerful channel for reaching customers. [According to Smart Insights](#), 97% of text messages are read within 15 minutes of delivery.

SMS messages can circumvent 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 messaging services.

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

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



2. What are the different types of SMS content?

The industry defines two main types of SMS content, person-to-person and application-to-person, and the latter category can be further subdivided into informational, promotional, and transactional messaging:

Person-to-Person (P2P)	Application-to-Person (A2P)		
<p>Conversational messaging is a back-and-forth conversation that takes place via text.</p> <p>Examples might include one-on-one conversations between a customer and a support team member.</p>	<p>Informational messaging is when a consumer gives their phone number to a business and asks to be contacted in the future.</p> <p>Appointment reminders, welcome texts, and alerts fall into this category because the first text sent by the business fulfills the consumer's request.</p> <p>A consumer should agree to receive texts when they give a business their mobile number.</p>	<p>Promotional messaging is when a business sends a message that contains a sales or marketing promotion.</p> <p>Adding a call to action (such as a coupon code to an informational text) may place a message in the promotional category.</p>	<p>Transactional messages are non-marketing messages that provide important information to customers, such as welcome messages, order confirmations, and shipping updates.</p>

More examples of A2P use cases include

- Providing financial account status updates or alerts
- Improving doctor-patient relationships with appointment reminders
- Confirming restaurant reservations
- Communicating safety information
- Updating customers on order status or delivery receipt
- Increasing profits with cart abandonment texts
- Sending lead alerts to sales teams
- Spreading word about upcoming events

In an A2P messaging context, a specific use case is generally referred to as a campaign.

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

The United States and Canada use four number types for text messaging.

Long codes are normal 10-digit phone numbers that enable you to engage in P2P conversational messaging with your customers.

10DLC (10-digit long code) is a service offered by major US carriers to explicitly allow commercial A2P SMS traffic over long code phone numbers. 10DLC is available only in the US. You can turn long codes into 10DLC numbers by [registering them in the Plivo console](#).

Toll-free numbers are used by businesses that want their customers to reach them at no cost. Incoming calls are billed to the called party and are free of charge for the calling party. Most countries reserve a set of dialing prefixes to denote toll-free services. In North America, 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844, and 833 denote toll-free numbers.

Businesses can use toll-free numbers to send SMS messages to opted-in customers.

Short codes are five- or six-digit numbers (for example, 123456) used to send and receive SMS messages. Unlike long code numbers, short codes are not tied to an area code, so they can be used across a country to provide a nationwide brand identity under one easy-to-remember number.



4. Do I have to have opt-in consent?

Senders must obtain proper consent (opt-in) before texting consumers. Industry organizations such as the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA) and the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) call for consent on an ethical basis. Regulatory bodies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have turned that consideration into law.

Consent may be implied (when someone provides their contact information to a business) or expressed. Express consent happens when an individual explicitly agrees to receive electronic communications from a business.

The type of consent required for business texting depends on the content sent to the consumer.

Implied consent is acceptable when:

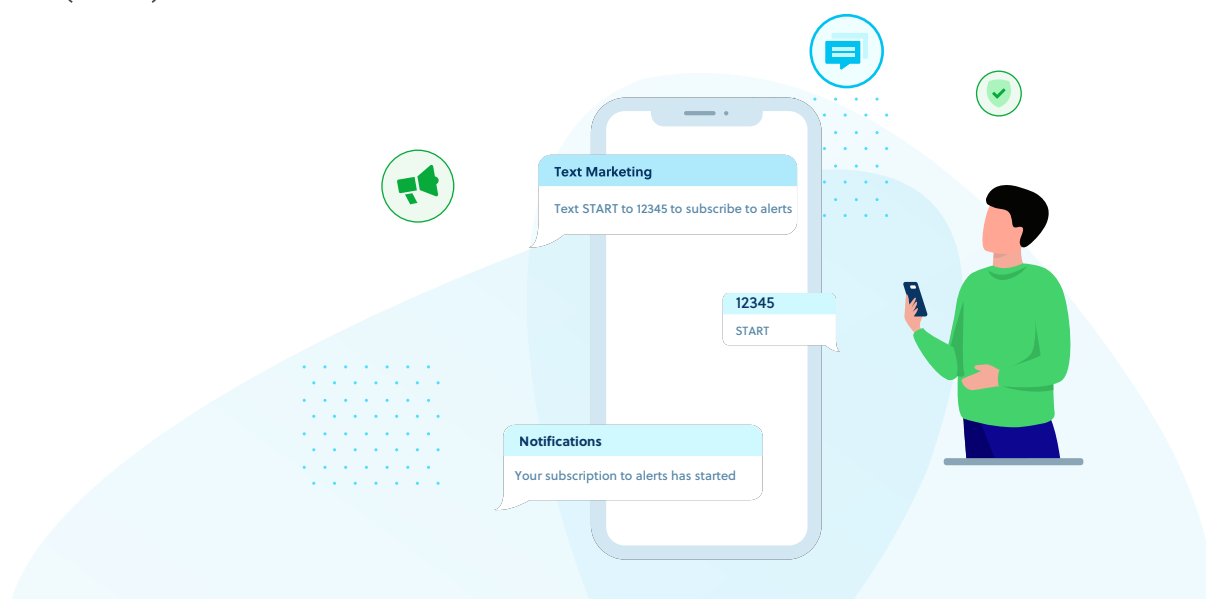
- The first message is sent by the consumer,
- It's a two-way conversation, and
- The business's message responds to a specific request.

If the consumer initiates the text message exchange and the business only responds to the consumer with relevant information, then no express permission is required.

In all other cases, businesses must get consumers' express consent before sending them text messages.

Consumers can give permission over text ("Text START to 12345 to subscribe to alerts," also known as keyword consent), on a form or website, or verbally. Written permission also works.

Businesses must maintain detailed opt-in records for each customer, as mobile network operators (MNO) often ask for them.



5. How can 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 as spam. These best practices make messages more valuable to consumers and 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 an application-to-person message originating from a specific request by the end user. In general, content should include:

- Your company name
- A STOP message that tells consumers how they can opt out of future messages
- A reference to the reason the message is being sent

While you don't need to include a STOP message in every message, consider sending it in every fourth or fifth one.

Message content should avoid:

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

SMS content tips

- **Use one recognizable number.**
Each campaign should use one primary phone number. We suggest using a single number for both text and voice calls.
- **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 write messages that sound the way you speak. Use contractions, use [active voice](#), and avoid nonstandard spellings. For example, "H! h0w ar3__you do1ng?" is a nonstandard spelling.

- **Ask for direct consent.**

You should collect the consumer consent yourself, and not use consent acquired from a third party. Consumers are expecting a relationship with the business with which they interact.

- **Set expectations on frequency.**

You should set expectations with consumers about message frequency. If you plan to send five texts a month, disclosing that expectation on the first interaction leads to a positive user experience.

6. What SMS message content should I avoid?

Message senders are expected to enforce restrictions on their own networks to bar sending certain types of content.

- **Promotional messages from lenders or affiliate marketers**

Promotional messaging with clear opt-in language is allowed on toll-free numbers, but lender or affiliate marketing messages are strictly prohibited and are 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 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 Truth In Advertising rules. The FTC prohibits unfair or deceptive advertising in any medium, including text messages

- **SHAFT**

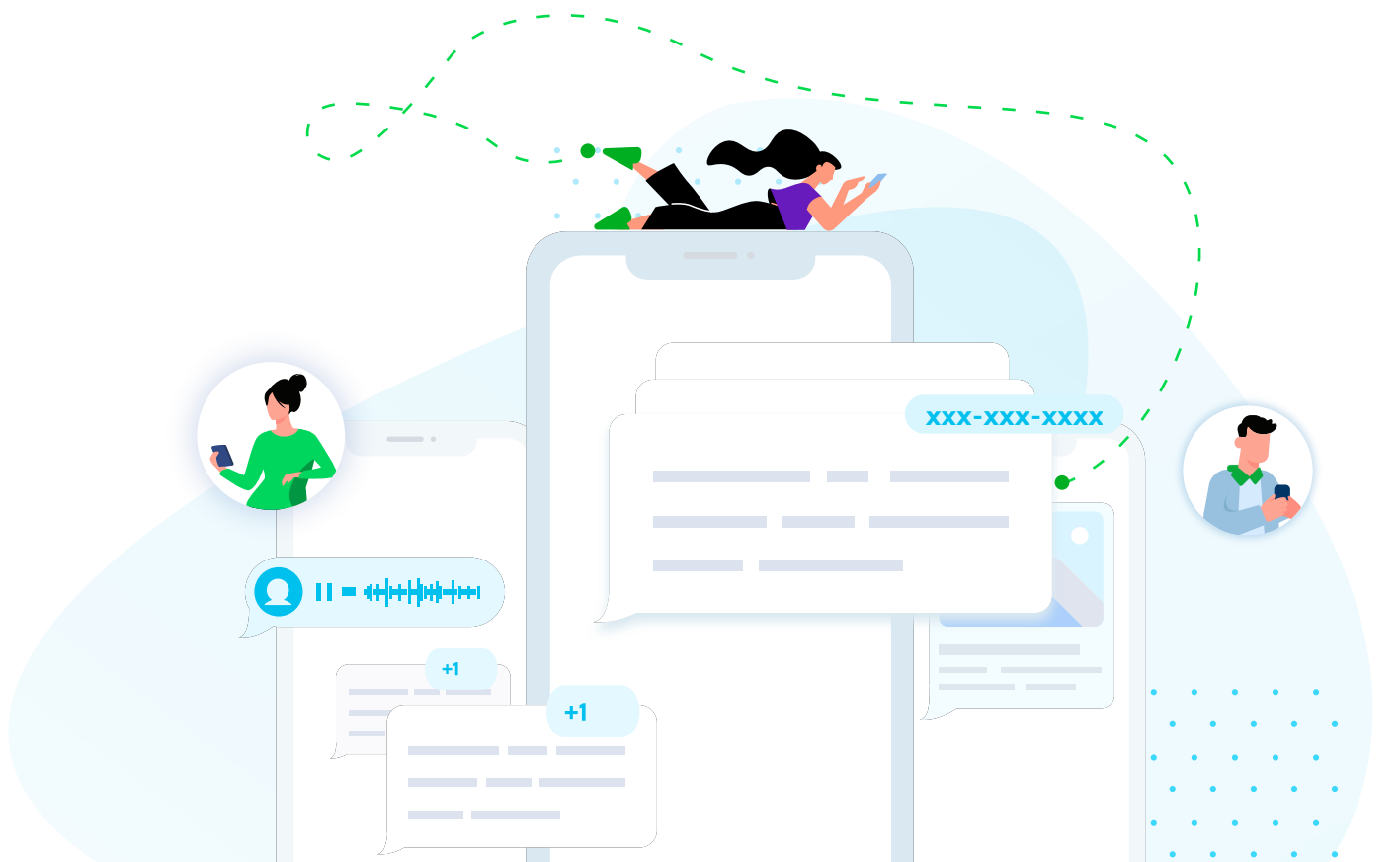
SHAFT stands for sex, hate, firearms, tobacco, and cannabis. Any message content containing terms specific to any SHAFT content is strictly forbidden on any number type, and may result in blocking.

- **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
- Loan offers
- Insurance quotes (unsolicited)
- Earn money from home job offers
- Debt relief/restructuring/refinancing offers

Carriers and MNOs don't preapprove or whitelist messaging content, but they do continuously monitor text messages traversing their networks. If automatic spam detection algorithms observe any of these disallowed forms of content, they flag it and send it to a human operator for an account review. If the operator sees prohibited content, they can suspend sending rights for a provisioned phone number, restrict high-throughput access, suspend provisioning rights for new phone numbers, or suspend all network services. The carrier may block the sending number and add the customer/brand sending such content to a global blacklist, causing reduced throughput approval on 10DLC numbers by end operators or permanent suspension of a campaign.



7. What actions might trigger a carrier review?

In addition to reviewing messages for disallowed content, carriers also monitor for disallowed sending practices. If a message sender is observed performing any of the disallowed sending practices listed below, the carrier may perform an account review, and may penalize senders by suspending sending rights for a provisioned phone number, restricting high-throughput access, suspending provisioning rights for new phone numbers, or suspending all network services.

- **Unsolicited messaging**

Before someone opts in, or after they opt out from a message sender, they should no longer receive messages from that sender, either on the same number or on a new one. If they do, it's likely that the opt-out event was either not processed or processed incorrectly within the message sender's network.

- **High opt-out rates**

The daily opt-out rate on a phone number is defined as the unique opt-outs from consumers within a 24-hour period divided by the total number of unique consumer phone numbers to which messages were sent. If the daily opt-out rate on a sending phone number is 5% or greater, 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 spreads messages across many source phone numbers specifically to dilute reputation metrics and evade filters. When a carrier discovers snowshoeing, it may suspend sending rights for the sending phone numbers immediately and ask providers like Plivo to suspend other traffic from the same sender.

- **Multiple numbers for similar content**

If your messaging use case requires the use of multiple numbers to distribute "similar" or "like" content, you should inform your carrier to have the numbers for this campaign excluded from this monitoring.

- **URL cycling**

URL cycling involves using multiple destination URLs on the same message content for the purpose of diluting reputation metrics and evading filters. It doesn't include the use of unique "personal" links to give a consumer custom content via a URL shortener or other means, which is allowed.

8. Which type of phone number should I use for messaging?

Different types of messaging are best suited to different kinds of phone numbers. You should match your content to an approved number type.

Bear in mind that each number type has different requirements for opt-in consent, and that consumers can revoke consent at any time. You must honor opt-out requests whether they're made by text, phone call, email, or another communication channel.

This table shows the considerations for each SMS number type in the US and Canada.

	Long Code	10-Digit Long Code	Toll-free	Short Code
Approved Content	All P2P	All A2P (AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon)	All A2P	A2P promotional
Approved Opt-In	Implied consent, express consent	Implied consent, express consent (varies depending on the use case)	Implied consent, express consent	Express consent, keyword consent
Throughput Limitations	1 message per 4 seconds	10DLC A2P throughput is not fixed; it varies by the vetting score* a brand is assigned. Throughput varies by operator between 4 and 75 messages per second.	US: 40 messages per second Canada: 1 message per second	100 messages per second
Procurement Time	Immediate	Varies by campaign type; may take 3–5 business days	1 business day	12–16 weeks
Number Type	10-digit number	10-digit number	10-digit number	Five- to six-digit number
Reach	US and Canada	US only	US and Canada	US and Canada
Cost		10DLC A2P campaigns incur carrier surcharge fees, as well as brand registration and ongoing campaign fees for both AT&T and T-Mobile. More details	Messages terminating on toll-free numbers within the Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile networks incur surcharges. More details	Details on short code fees
Usage Examples	Number masking, conversational SMS	Transactional, marketing, one-time passwords, notifications, customer care messaging	One-time passwords, security alerts, order confirmations, reminders, surveys, customer care messaging	Marketing, alerts, reminders, promotions, event announcements

* Upon receipt of 10DLC registration information, carriers outsource their verification and risk assessment evaluations to an independent organization called The Campaign Registry. TCR evaluates each registration based on the information the registrant provides and assigns a vetting score to each registration that determines the maximum throughput the carrier will allow for a brand.

9. Get started with text messaging from Plivo

Message formats, carrier rules, country rules, spam — it sounds complicated, but Plivo's SMS platform provides you the technology you need, and we build in guidance on how to use it to stay in compliance with regulations and industry best practices. Now that you know how to maximize the effectiveness of your SMS messages, it's time to put these best practices to use and get started with Plivo's SMS API.



Consent language samples and examples

Sample express consent language (opt in)

The content samples below apply to long code and toll-free numbers.
Short codes have more exact opt-in language requirements.

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

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

It's a best practice to notify consumers that they can opt out from future messages from the sender by including a sentence like "Reply STOP to unsubscribe" at the end of the initial message you send them. We recommend sending this communication every fifth message for continued consumer awareness.

Revoking consent (opt out)

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, an opt-out is not triggered.

Valid opt-out messages

"STOP" "Stop" "stop" "STop"

Invalid opt-out messages

"Hey, can you stop texting me?" "Stop it!"

When you receive an opt-out request, you should cease all text message exchanges with the destination number. Plivo will automatically place a temporary 90-day block on a sender/destination number pair when we receive an opt-out request.

After receiving an opt-out request, you should reply to the consumer with a generic message that confirms the request and gives instructions on how to opt back in to the service.

Example of opt-out confirmation message

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

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 record them as "opted out" from SMS communications to ensure that consumers' consent choices are honored and no one in the organization attempts to send messages to them.

Sending to a customer who has opted out

Plivo will return an error message to senders that attempt to send a text message to an opted-out customer.

Re-invoking consent (opt back in)

A consumer can opt back in at any time by replying with the keyword "UNSTOP". 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.

Valid opt-in messages

"UNSTOP" "Unstop" "unstop" "UNStop"

Invalid opt-in messages

"Hey, can you enable me again?" "Unstop me!"

After receiving an unstop, the business should reply to the consumer with a generic message that informs them they can start two-way texting with the sender's phone number again.

Example "UNSTOP" confirmation message

You 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.

SMS-specific privacy policy and terms of service

Content samples below apply to long code and toll-free number types.
Short codes have more specific privacy policy and terms of service language requirements.

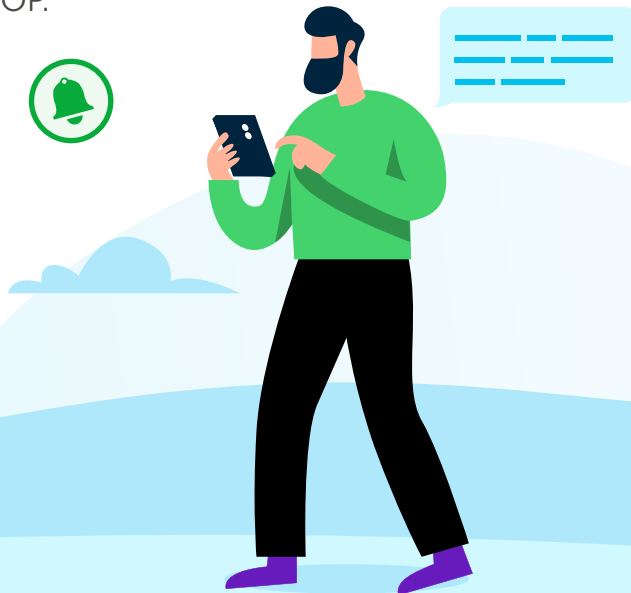
When you begin using text messaging, we recommend adding language to your corporate privacy policy and terms of service to specifically address SMS. For example:

Privacy policy

"We collect your phone number specifically for the purpose of communicating with you via text messaging. We do not share or sell your phone number with 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, reply to a message with the word STOP. Should you choose to begin receiving messages again, send the word UNSTOP."



About Us

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 more than 1,600 carrier networks and connectivity in 190+ countries.

Want to learn more?

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