

IDEAPAPER

SMS Marketing: Alternatives to Shared Short Codes

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The SMS landscape in the U.S. is undergoing some big changes: wireless carriers are no longer provisioning shared short codes (SSCs). With this shift, marketers won't be able to deliver SMS messages via SSC anymore.

Challenges to SSCs

Since their inception, SSCs have posed numerous risks and difficulties for both carriers and businesses. Naturally, carriers want to know who and what is running over their network, but with SSCs, there is no transparency with the content or content providers using them. Perhaps it's no surprise then that these types of codes are among the top sources of harmful and unwanted messaging in the short code messaging space. The brands using SSCs also have their share of challenges:

- **You're unable to control who else uses your SSC and what content they're sharing.** This means SSCs are susceptible to sudden suspension or termination because of negative behavior from other brands. If another brand's messages are deemed spam, those messages will affect the SSC you're sharing.
- **SSCs can also cause customer confusion.** The image below shows that both Brand A and Brand B are using the same short code, and even the same templated message, to encourage users to sign up for text alerts.



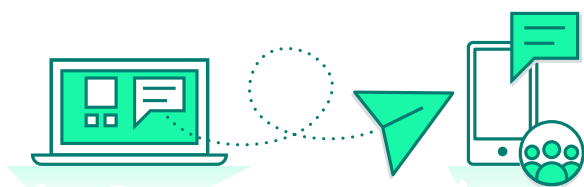
- **SMS keyword availability is limited.** Brands use keywords to encourage users to opt-in to specific campaigns. For example, a loyalty program that asks you to text "REWARDS" to 1-800-LOYAL to enter into a free gift giveaway is using the SMS keyword "REWARDS." However, when sharing codes, keyword choice is limited and the ones that make sense for your brand or industry might already be taken.
- **When you share a short code, you're also sharing the opt-outs.** In other words, when a customer wants to opt-out of receiving your marketing messages, they can typically do so by simply sending "STOP" to the code, or by sending "[KEYWORD] STOP" (e.g., "REWARDS STOP" or "SALE STOP"). The latter would just opt them out from the specific campaign associated with that keyword, while the first opts them out from the entire code. Customers might, in an attempt to unsubscribe from Brand A, go ahead and send the word "STOP" without a keyword. If Brand B also had that same customer, they've lost their opt-in as well.

The disadvantages to SSCs have long been known, but they remained a popular option for their price and their immediate provisioning. As SSCs reach their end of life, all carriers have implemented a new type of code that provides a middle ground between dedicated short codes (DSCs) and toll-free numbers (TFNs) in terms of throughput and cost: 10-digit long codes (10DLC).

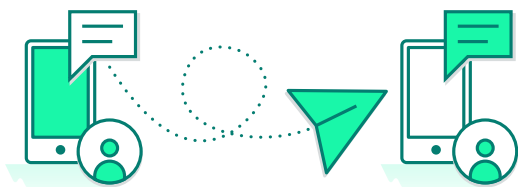
To prepare for this change and continue providing our customers with the best SMS marketing solution, Acoustic now supports 10DLC in addition to DSC and TFN.

Understanding the alternatives to SSCs

SMS messaging falls within one of two categories: application-to-person (A2P) and person-to-person (P2P) messaging. A2P messaging is any kind of traffic in which a person is receiving messages from an application. A2P messaging includes marketing messages, reminders, notifications, and one-time passwords (OTPs). P2P messaging, on the other hand, is defined as a back-and-forth conversation between two people.



Application-to-Person



Person-to-Person

All [Acoustic Campaign](#) messaging is considered A2P, and there are several options for how to send your SMS traffic. We've broken down each option below to help you understand how to leverage them with the end of SSCs.

Dedicated Short Codes (DSCs)

A short code is a five- or six-digit phone number that enables two-way SMS messaging. DSCs are available in two varieties: vanity and random. Often, brands choose a vanity code because they look cleaner and can be created with an easy-to-memorize string of numbers or numbers that are meaningful to your brand.

Random short codes are assigned and typically not as memorable.

DSCs support two-way messaging, but do not support voice calls. They can send higher volumes of messages compared to their longer-digit cousins, so wireless carriers individually audit each short code for its intent. The approval process takes between eight to 12 weeks, but because of this, DSCs are not subject to carrier filtering.

Due to their high throughput, though, they're subject to a strict set of requirements established by the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA). One of these rules identifies specific language requirements you must include in any ad, term page, and message. Interpretation and enforcement varies by carrier, but each carrier and the CTIA can subject short codes to random compliance audits and your DSC can get shut down if it's not up to par.

Toll-free numbers (TFNs)

Most of us are familiar with the classic jingles that include a 1-800 number — you probably have even had a tough time getting them out of your head! TFNs are 10-digit numbers that begin with 1- and an area code: either 888, 877, 866, 855, 844, 833, or 800. TFNs support both one-way and two-way calling and can be text-enabled.

TFNs are exclusively used for transactional messages and are only capable of a very low transaction-per-second (TPS) since only one message can be sent at a time. Brands looking to enable large SMS marketing messages should steer clear from TFNs. But while they're not a great option for those looking to do high-volume SMS, TFNs work well for person-to-person communications like customer support or sales.

10-digit long codes (10DLCs)

10DLCs look exactly like a traditional phone number, including the area code. These numbers can support a high volume of text messages and are registered exclusively to your business, making SMS an effective anti-spam channel. Brands can set up their 10DLC in a short period – only about three to four weeks. This is the best option for mass SMS messaging campaigns with an affordable price tag and high trustworthiness.

10DLCs have better deliverability than TFNs. They're sanctioned by mobile carriers and

therefore are not subject to the same strict filtering. However, they don't offer the same deliverability guarantees as DSCs.

Since this option is fairly new, carriers are in the process of developing their throughput guidelines. However, an important thing to consider is what's an acceptable level of throughput rate for your brand? For many, the standard 10DLC throughput works well.

By offering high send rates, fast set-up times, and affordable costs, we expect 10DLCs to be the future of SMS marketing.

Alternatives at-a-glance

	Dedicated Short Codes (DSC)	Toll-free Numbers (TFN)	10-digit Long Codes (10DLC)
Digits	5 to 6	10	10
Example	22001	1-800-780-8000	402-230-3000
Provisioning Time	12-14 weeks	5 business days	3-4 weeks
Price Range	\$\$\$	\$	\$\$
Type of Traffic	Transactional and Promotional	Transactional	Transactional and Promotional
Use Cases	Alerts, time-sensitive notifications, reminders, marketing communications, large bursts, high-volume (100 messages per second or more)	Customer service, back-and-forth with customers, internal alerts, following up on a customer service call	Account notifications, customer care, delivery notifications, marketing, public service announcements
Carrier Filtering	No	Yes	Yes
Pass-through Fees	Yes	Verizon Only	Yes
Delivery Receipts	Yes	Yes	No

Determining your A2P SMS strategy

Each form of A2P SMS has different capabilities and drawbacks. The most important differences are outlined in the above table, and they are a result of relying on separate sets of infrastructure and spam filters.

Some questions that you could ask yourself to help determine which approach makes the most sense for you include:

- What is or what could be the maximum size of your audience when sending a one-time SMS message?
- How critical is it to your business to know if the message was sent and/or delivered? Links can be used to track engagement regardless of the type of code, but sent/delivered metrics depend on the type of code.
- How urgently do you need to start sending SMS messages?
- What's the budget allocated to this channel?

No matter which A2P SMS strategy you choose, [Acoustic Campaign](#) can support you. [Connect with our team](#) if you'd like us to guide you through the incorporation of this important channel into your marketing strategy.





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To learn more about how Acoustic can benefit your team, [get in touch with us today.](#)

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Sofia Arrambide is a Product Director responsible for infusing channels like push, SMS, social and more into Acoustic Campaign. Born in Uruguay and living in Chile, she leads the worldwide efforts related to channels in Acoustic Campaign. This includes research of what's trending and what Acoustic's customers need, overseeing the product roadmap, and seeking to turn every customer's issue into an opportunity to enhance and create further delighting experiences.