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## **PRESS RELEASE – SOUTH AFRICA**

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#### **Veteran technology shows its longevity**

By Dr Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com

It seems a bit crazy to call a technology that is coming up for its twentieth birthday a “veteran”. But if you consider the massive explosion of digital communications technology over the past few years, you start to realise just how long SMS has been around for.

Not only that, but SMS has also proved to be an amazingly adaptable technology. For instance, it has often been predicted that the rise of the smartphone would be the death of SMS. Quite the contrary, however: a survey from social communications agency CloudTalk showed that text messaging was the number one activity Americans used their smartphones for, with voice calling in fourth place.

Indeed, ABI Research reported that there were 4.2 billion users of SMS globally at the end of last year, and Portio Research predicts a massive eight trillion SMSs will be sent in 2011, up from 6.9 trillion in 2010.

There are a number of reasons for SMS’s amazing staying power, and I’d argue that top amongst them are its ubiquity; the fact that it is an asynchronous communication channel; and its robustness.

#### **1. Ubiquitous**

SMS is an open standard that was accepted by and included in the GSM cellular standard. This means that every GSM cell phone has to support SMS. In addition, due to SMS’s popularity, even the competing cellular technology, CDMA, has incorporated SMS. (And if you remember the almost religious wars between GSM and CDMA in the early 2000s, you’ll realise what an achievement this is.)

Because SMS is an open standard, it is not linked to one organisation in the way that communications such as Facebook, Twitter and even Skype are. If anything is a certainty in this day and age, it’s that nothing is certain when it comes to social media. Look at the demise of Myspace – once the king of all social networks. So for consumers and businesses alike, SMS’s ubiquity reduces the concern that it might one day simply “go away”.

Another result of SMS’s ubiquity is that it is linked to a person’s cell number, rather than another naming convention like a username. So if you have the cell number for a person, you know that you can reach them via SMS and that they can immediately read your message, without any complicated set-up.

#### **2. Asynchronous communication**

As the CloudTalk survey shows, people are talking less and using asynchronous communication channels such as SMS and instant messaging more. This has a lot to do with the increase in information and communication we have to deal with every day, especially thanks to an increase in cheap communication channels. We are no longer prepared to interrupt whatever we are doing to accept a call, for instance. Even voicemail is beginning to be seen as an intrusion, with more people requesting an SMS rather. SMS however, offers the two-way nature of a real-time interaction but allows each party to respond in their time.



### **3. Robustness**

SMS uses the same signalling systems that are used to set up calls over mobile networks. In addition, there is no denying it is an expensive communication channel compared to some others, which helps keep volumes down. This means it can be used for mission-critical communications, such as banking alerts, or emergency notifications. SMS does not need internet access to work, and oftentimes even when calls cannot go through in a low coverage area, an SMS can be sent and received.

Businesses also need a stable technology, for example, to inform their customers that their car is ready for collection after a service; or to make sure marketing communications are sent out at the right time of the day, to the right people; or to allow customers to opt in to communications at the point of sale or other brand engagements.

In addition an eco-system of application-to-person (A2P) bulk SMS providers has emerged. These service providers both ensure a certain level of quality of SMS routes, and can effectively integrate bulk SMS services into existing business systems, providing an easy-to-use service plus reporting and other administration functions. Juniper expects A2P SMS messaging to overtake person-to-person SMS by 2016.

So while SMS might not be seen as user-friendly or feature-rich as some of the newer communication channels that have sprung up recently, its ubiquitous and robust nature will see it win time and time again.