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A guide to conversational messaging

The rich messaging channels helping brands
to create meaningful two-way interactions.

eGuide



A new generation

Our increasingly digital, always-on world is transforming the way companies connect with consumers on a daily basis.

Leading the charge is a new generation of rich messaging channels. Owned and championed by leading technology players like Google and Apple, these channels have emerged as a platform for orchestrating digital interactions that inspire and maintain conversations with customers.

While many brands already use SMS and email, channels like Apple Business Chat and RCS represent the next step in mobile-optimized engagement. They offer brands an opportunity

to be where their customers are, on highly visible channels, delivering an anytime, anywhere experience. Through a combination of rich media capabilities, AI technology, and an asynchronous approach to implementation, these channels enable brands to lead with app-like, two-way conversational interactions for everything from proactive notifications to solving FAQs. Ultimately, there are hundreds of use cases to engage and support throughout the customer lifecycle.

In this guide, you will learn about the different channels, understanding their capabilities and why they are essential to delivering an experience that will win and retain customers.



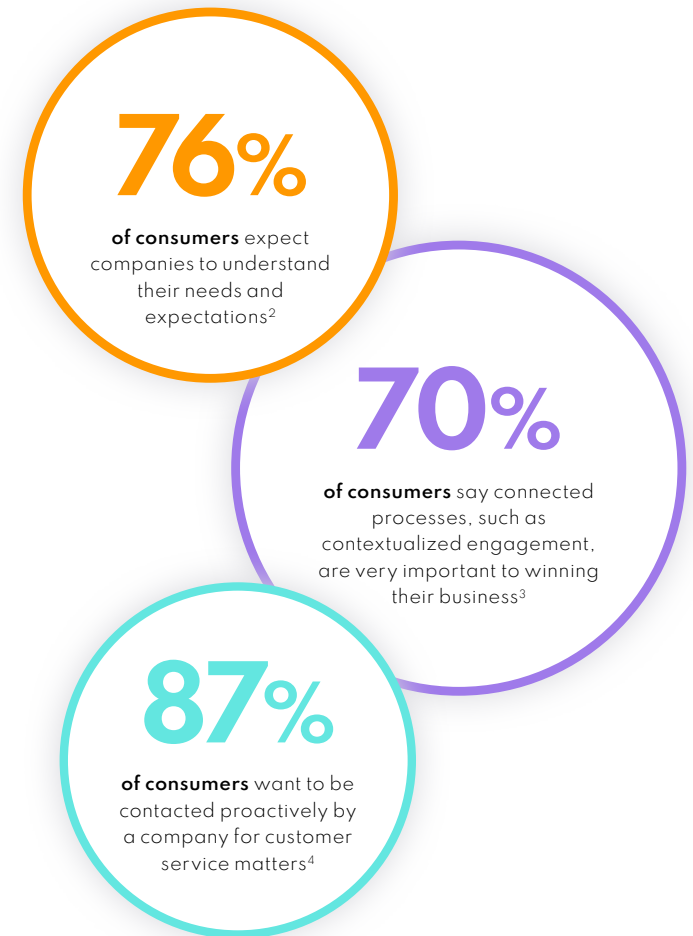
Meeting the needs of today's consumer

Customer experience is a key competitive advantage for consumer businesses. Consumers have more choice than ever before, and they know it. This means that they have high expectations when it comes to interacting with any brand.

It's widely known that consumers are increasingly mobile-first and digitally savvy - only 12%¹ of millennials cite the telephone as their favorite communication channel. These 'connected' consumers have reshaped what is expected when it comes to customer experience. They want to be able to use the channels they prefer, for brands to proactively engage and address their requirements, to self-serve and solve simple queries quickly, and for every interaction to be personalized to them.

Meeting and exceeding these expectations is a strategic priority and will determine a brand's success in an increasingly competitive market. As a result, meeting the needs of the 'connected' consumer is top of the agenda for many digital transformation initiatives.

Investing in mobile experiences — and the wide range of new channels and formats — is a way of improving customer experience, driving higher customer loyalty, and future-proofing your brand during a time of rapid digital change.

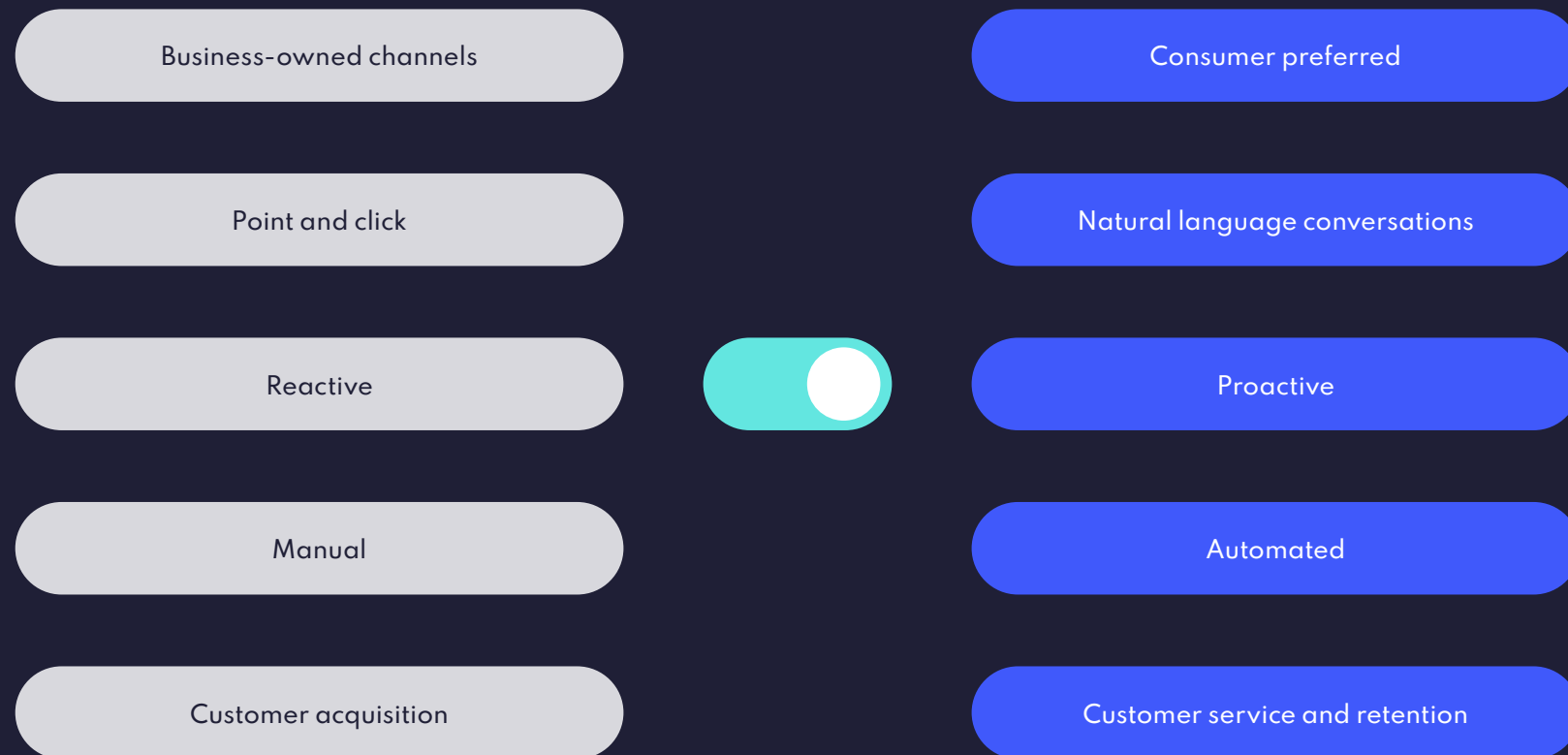


¹ www.commsbusiness.co.uk

^{2,3} www.salesforce.com

⁴ www.superoffice.com

Digital natives have reshaped consumer CX expectations



Why conversational messaging matters

Conversational messaging refers to a brand's use of digital channels to provide meaningful two-way engagement at scale. It's about delivering more personalized interactions that create a better experience on the channels that consumers want to use.

Brands are already successfully using new rich messaging channels for a wide range of use cases. Best Buy customers are using RCS to shop daily deals, view weekly promotions, and manage curbside pickup. T-mobile enable Apple users to rate plans, buy a new phone, pay their bills, and send screenshots to resolve an issue through Apple Business Chat. Barclays bank uses the WhatsApp Business API to provide customer support for a variety of queries.

Conversational messaging channels are essential to the omnichannel communication approach, offering consumers a choice in how they want to engage. Through a range of touchpoints, they gain access to 24/7 customer service and valuable proactive updates. They can type and tap to conveniently make purchases and get the information they need.

For brands, conversational messaging channels offer a way to increase automation and scale customer journeys. They are becoming the foremost digital medium for growing and maintaining relationships with new and existing customers to drive sales and increase retention.



59%

of consumers want to use messaging more to make purchases¹



75%

prefer to use messaging channels for customer service²



41%

of millennials use chatbots on a daily basis³

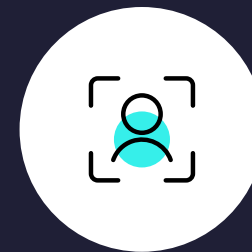
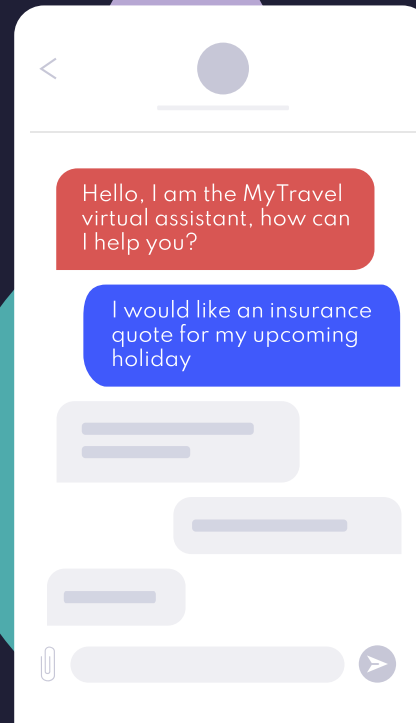
¹ www.facebook.com
² www.customerthink.com
³ www.acquire.io

Conversational messaging delivers on both strategic and CX objectives



Brand objectives

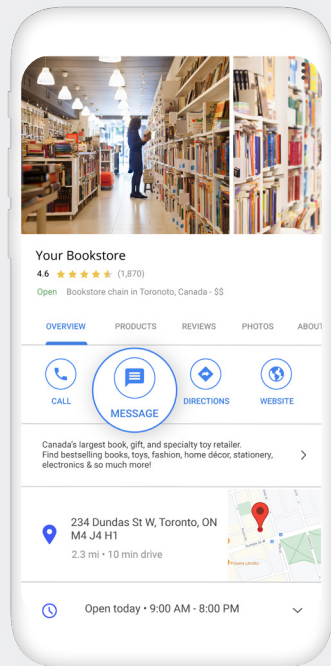
- Achieve CX differentiation
- Accelerate the launch of new services
- Reduce contact center load
- Increase automation
- Increase reach and accessibility
- Data utilization and personalization



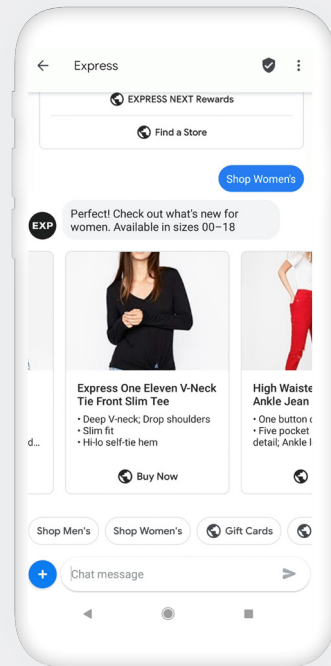
Customer expectations

- 24/7 service availability
- The ability to self-serve
- Quick service and instant responses
- Individual personalization
- The ability to choose from multiple business touchpoints
- In-channel fulfillment

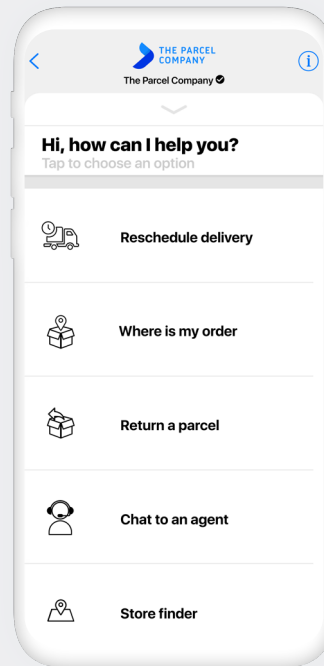
Conversational messaging interactions that transform CX



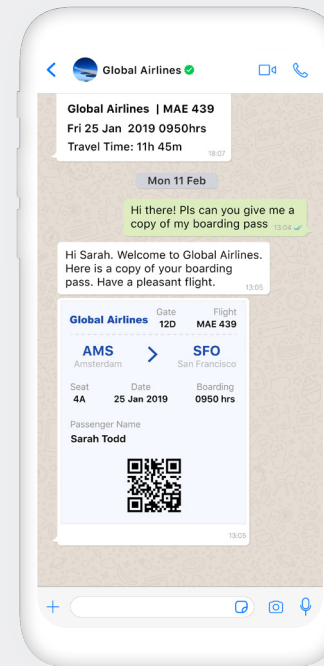
Discover



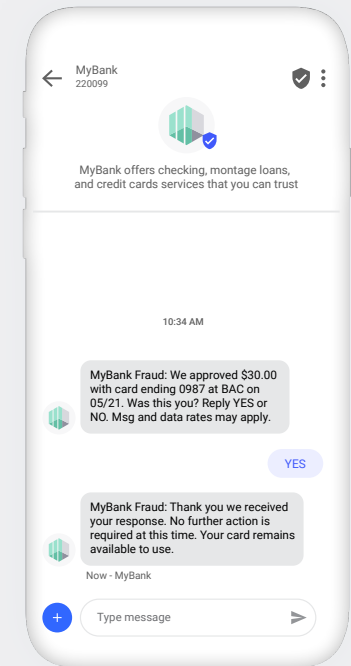
Sell and manage services



Remind and deliver



Support



Protect

The channels

Brands are already reaping the benefits of conversational messaging. In the next part of the guide, we look at the rich messaging channels that we believe are a priority for brands to integrate into their customer experience strategy.



Apple Business Chat

As always, Apple is a leader in innovation, including when it comes to enabling rich messaging interactions. Apple Business Chat, sometimes abbreviated as ABC, is a way for iOS users to connect directly with brands through their iPhone, iPad, Mac, and Apple Watch.

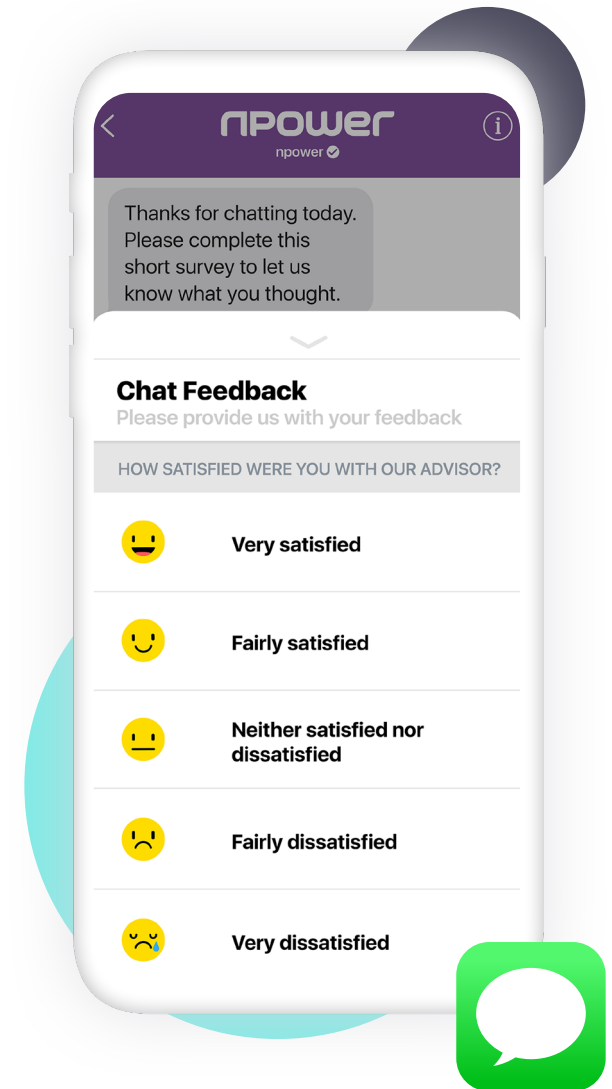
To guide users to the channel, Apple Business Chat has various native entry points, with the 1.5 billion Apple device users able to search for a brand in Safari, Maps, Spotlight, or Siri, and then simply tap the Messages icon to begin chatting. Custom entry points can also be used – with website and app buttons, QR codes, and links opening up the channel.

Apple has designed Apple Business Chat primarily for customer care, meaning that users must initiate the conversation. Users can engage with a brand to gain customer service support,

ask for information, schedule appointments, or complete purchases, all from within the Messages app. The channel is asynchronous by design, meaning a user might start a conversation with a customer service agent on their iPhone while commuting, and then they can resume the chat on their iPad when they get home.

To ensure an excellent experience for their users, Apple has created conversational messaging guidelines and best practices that must be followed. For example, brands need to respond to customer inquiries within less than one hour, and virtual assistants must always have an intelligent agent fall-back option.

Brands with a large number of Apple customers, or those looking to acquire more, should put Apple Business Chat at the top of their priority list.



Feature overview:

Verified business profiles display brand logo, contact details, and address details.

Chat Suggest is a way to deflect calls to Business Chat. Users who tap to call from a website, search, or email are prompted to message instead.

Rich cards show important content. They can include images, titles, and description text to make it easy for users to consume the information that matters most.

Carousels display multiple rich cards that allow users to scroll through options like a list.

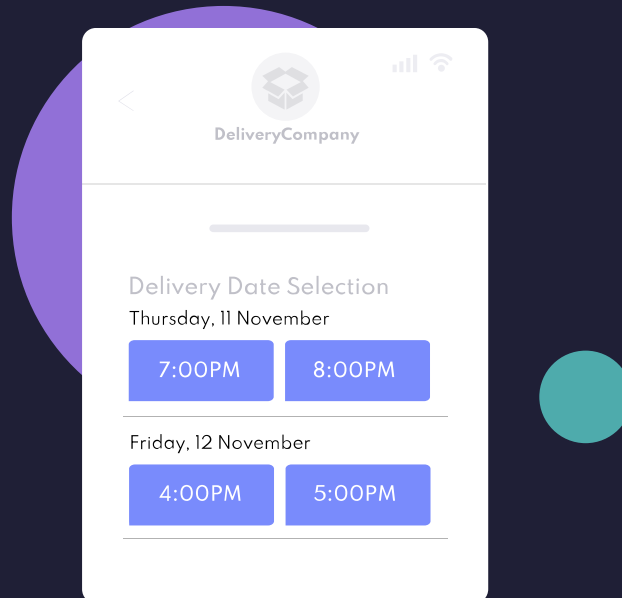
Rich media can be sent through the channel, including images, GIFs, and videos.

List pickers provide visually organized choices to users.

Time pickers give users a choice to conveniently schedule item pick ups, deliveries, and appointments.

Rich links provide a way to send interactive links and videos with the ability to preview and playback from within the Messages app.

Apple Pay provides an easy and secure way for customers to buy goods and services through Business Chat.



RCS Business Messages

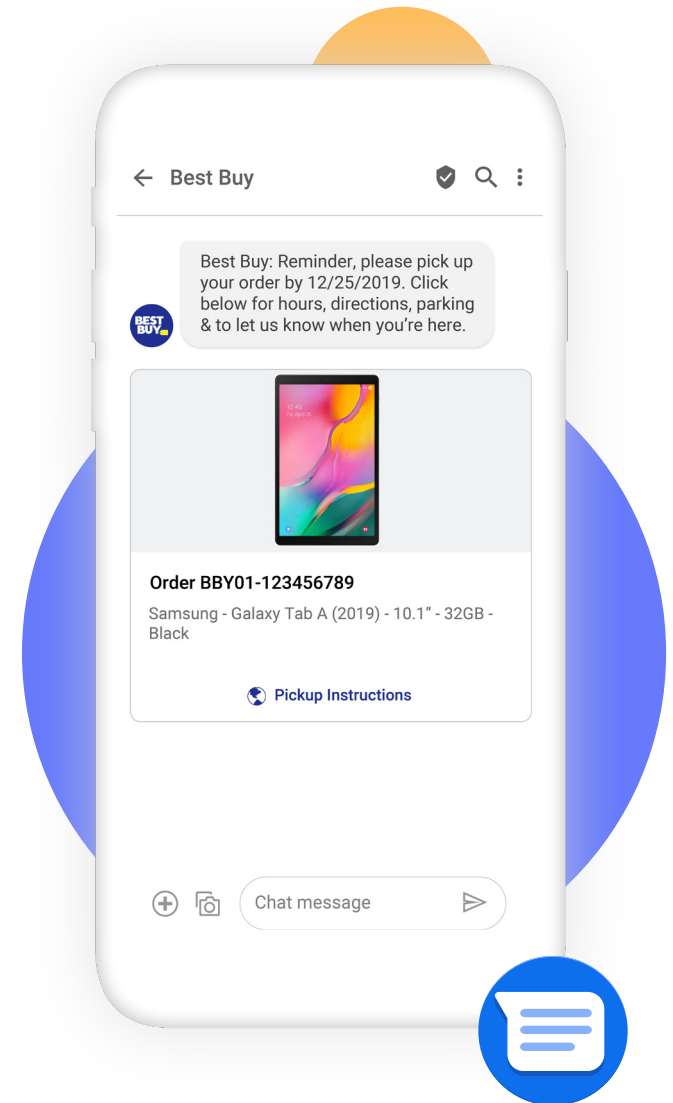
RCS stands for Rich Communication Services. An evolution of SMS, RCS is a GSMA defined standard of messaging that is championed by Google and several key operator groups globally.

RCS provides a native and secure environment on android devices that transforms P2P and A2P messaging into an app-like, feature-rich experience. Brands can craft engaging rich media messages that make use of buttons, carousels, suggested replies, and much more. One of the channel's unique selling points is that it can be used for proactive outreach, as all brands need to initiate contact with a customer for marketing or customer service is a mobile number.

Greater collaboration between operators, MaaP providers, and device manufacturers is speeding up the adoption of RCS.

According to the GSMA, the global audience of monthly active users for RCS grew to 473 million in 2021 — across 90 global operator deployments. With the channel showing great promise, it is predicted that users of RCS will increase to 3.9 billion by 2025.

The need for brands to start using RCS continues to grow. In-market campaigns of RCS are showing read rates anywhere from 73% to 92%, highlighting RCS's tremendous ability to reach customers on the app they use most frequently: the native messaging client. These campaigns are also delivering click-through rates (CTR) higher than both SMS and email, demonstrating RCS's potential for driving meaningful engagement.



Feature overview:

Verified business profiles display brand name, logo, and a verification badge. UI components can be stylized and colored in line with a brand's visual identity.

Rich media such as high-resolution images, videos, GIFs, and file transfers.

Rich cards that include images, titles, and description text.

Carousels display multiple rich cards that allow users to scroll through options like a list.

Suggested actions guide users and simplify calls to action. RCS examples include dial a number, view a location in Maps, share a location, create a calendar event, and open a link.

Metrics that include when the message was read, how long the user spent on the message, as well as any interactions with content.

Deep-link capability means that a conversation can move from RCS straight into an app or open a website URL – and back again.



Google's Business Messaging

Did you know that there are 3.5 billion searches every day on Google? All these searches result in trillions of visits to websites and billions of calls to businesses.

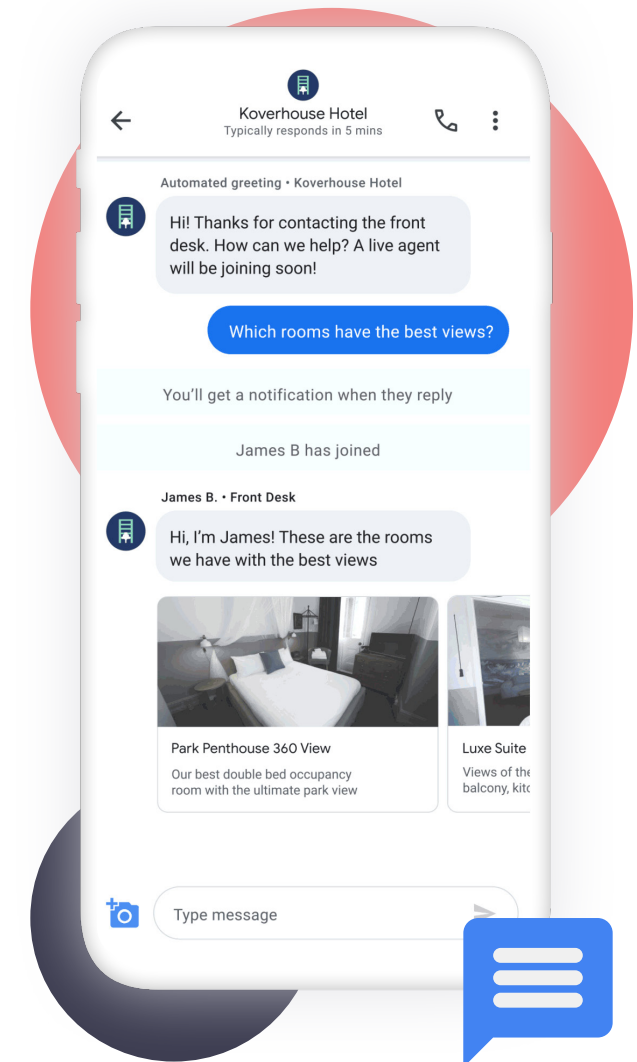
Now, Google has made it even easier for users to get the answers they need. They have connected the power of search to the ability to message by introducing Business Messages. Embedded within Search and Maps, Business Messages gives users the ability to discover and start messaging a brand. To do this, users tap a button that appears alongside their website, click-to-call, or directions icons.

Once the interaction begins, brands can offer conversational messaging experiences for purchasing, scheduling, and upselling. For customer care, users can self-serve for

common queries and live chat with agents. Both chatbots and customer service agents can take advantage of rich cards, carousels, suggested replies, and other rich media, to deliver more engaging interactions.

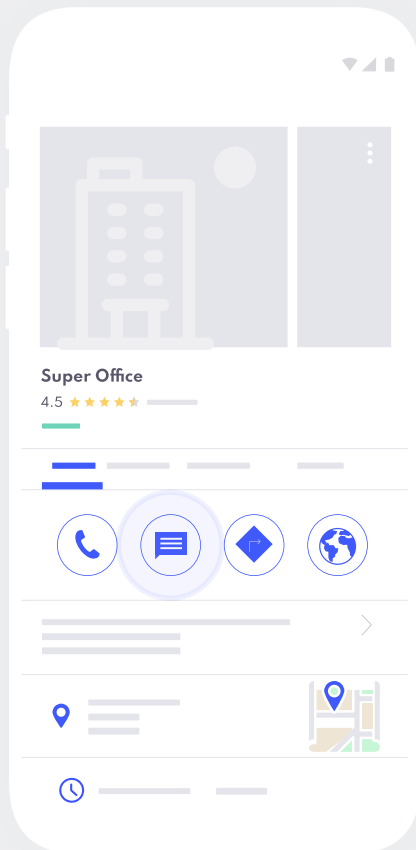
Although a relatively new channel to the rich messaging mix, with the volume of Google searches growing by roughly 10%¹ every year, Business Messages is an opportunity for brands to turn a growing number of searches by potential and existing customers into conversations.

Google works with a number of communication providers as part of their partner program to roll out the channel. These partners can build with the technology, influence the roadmap for future features, and help brands get to market quickly.

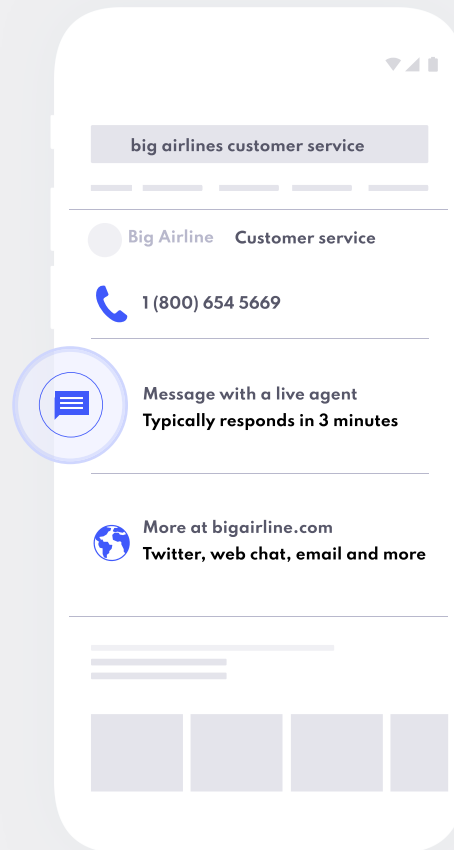


¹ www.wordstream.com

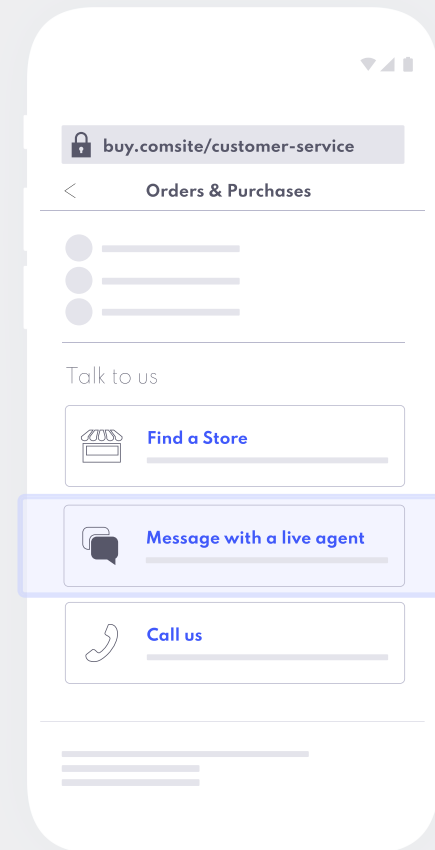
It's easy for users to discover and start messaging on Google's Business Messages



Local search



Organic search



Third-party

Feature overview:

Rich cards that include images, titles, prices, and description text.

Carousels display multiple rich cards that allow users to scroll through options like a list.

Verified business profiles display brand name, logo, address details, a verification badge, and more.

Typing indicators, delivery confirmations, and read receipts enrich the messaging experience.

Suggested replies guide users through a chatbot experience and enable them to respond with a tap of a button.

Expected response times help to set customer expectations.

Rich media includes the ability to send and receive emojis, images, and videos.



Verified communications

Customer trust is essential to increasing customer engagement. 57% of people who communicate with a brand via SMS are concerned about fraud, and 87% won't answer a call unless they recognize the number. For this reason, every other rich messaging channel in this guide offers a verified business profile feature.

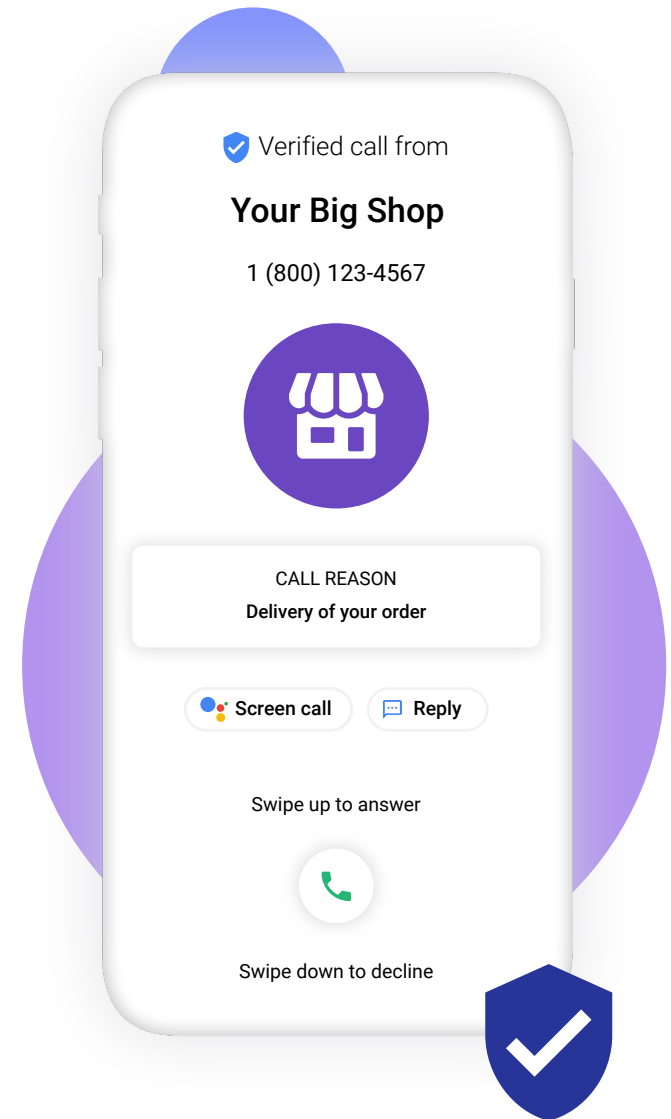
Enabled by Google for Android devices, verified communications covers two channels – Verified SMS and Verified Calls. Both solutions add a layer of authenticity to standard communication channels that businesses already use every day.

Verified SMS makes SMS messaging safer and more trustworthy by adding sender verification, link previews, and branding to messages. Verified Calls displays a brand's name, logo, reason for calling, and a verification symbol when a call is made. Brands can verify any phone number, including toll-free, local, and

short codes. Whatever the channel, both help to increase the chance of a successful engagement.

Both channels have been initially rolled out in the U.S., Mexico, Brazil, Spain, the UK, France, India, and many more. There are also some drawbacks that need to be addressed. The Verified Communication solutions are not supported on Apple iOS devices, and only work in the Android Messaging App and Google Dialer. There is no word on whether Apple may support Verified SMS or Verified Calls in the future. Unfortunately, Verified SMS does not work for MMS messages – therefore, if images or videos are sent as the first message, they will appear as unverified in the transcript in the Messages app.

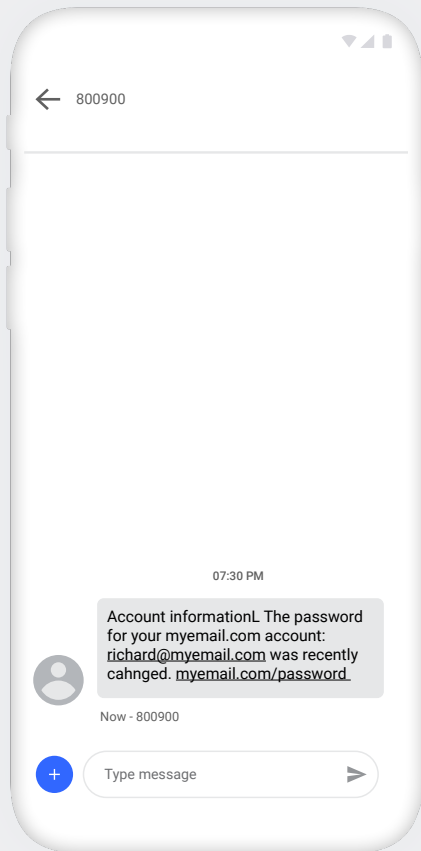
Any brand that calls or sends SMS messages to Android users, whether that be for sales, CRM or customer service purposes, should consider investing in Verified Communications.



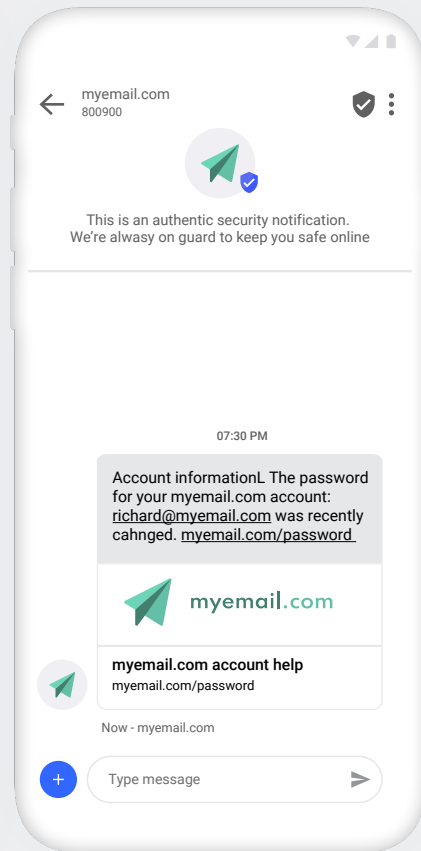
¹ www.which.co.uk

² www.martechtoday.com

Verified SMS

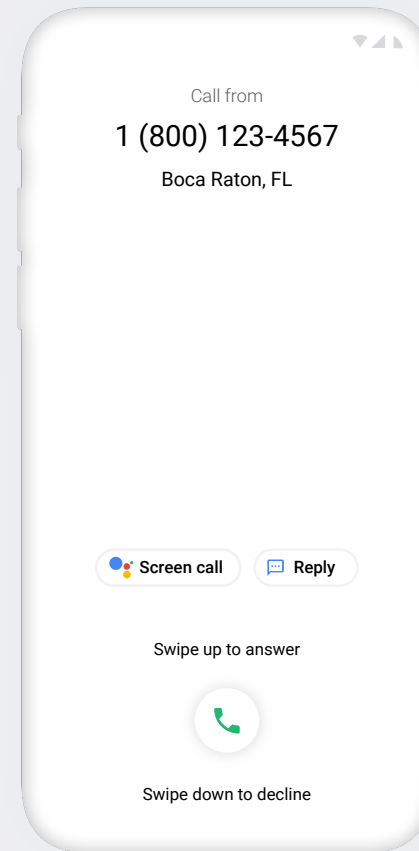


Regular SMS

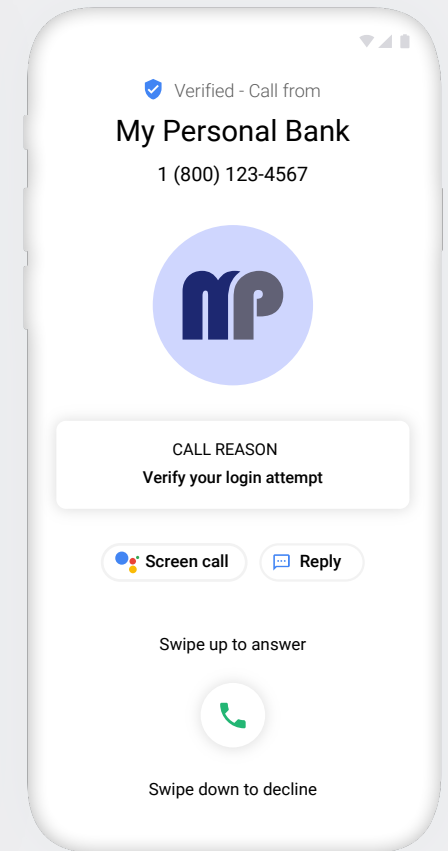


Verified SMS

Verified Calls



Regular Call



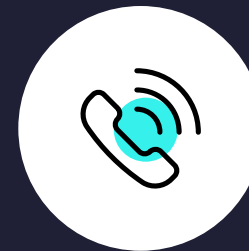
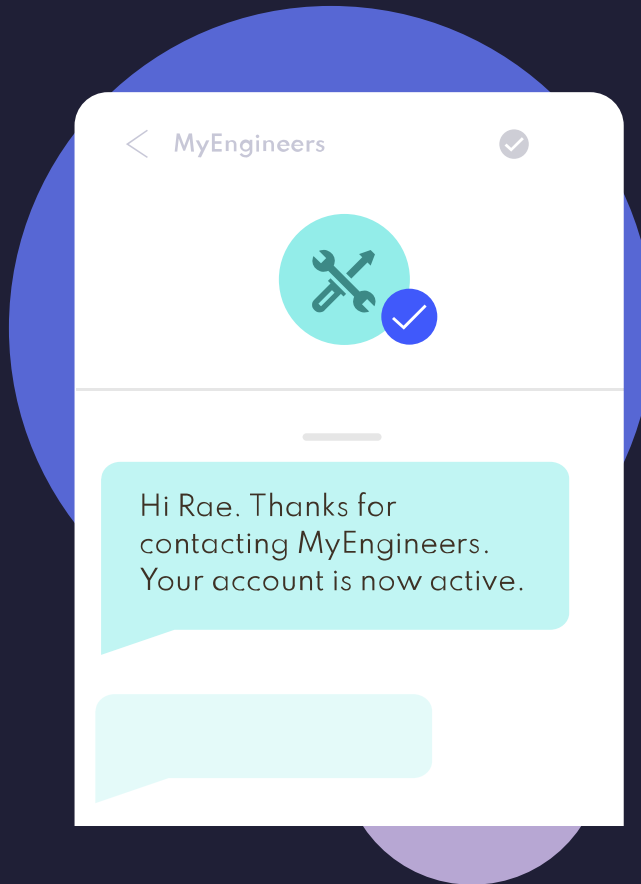
Verified Call

Feature overview:



Verified SMS:

- Business name
- Verification badge
- Start card with logo and description
- Branded messages
- Link previews



Verified Calls:

- Business name
- Verification badge
- Call reason preview
- Branded messages

WhatsApp Business API

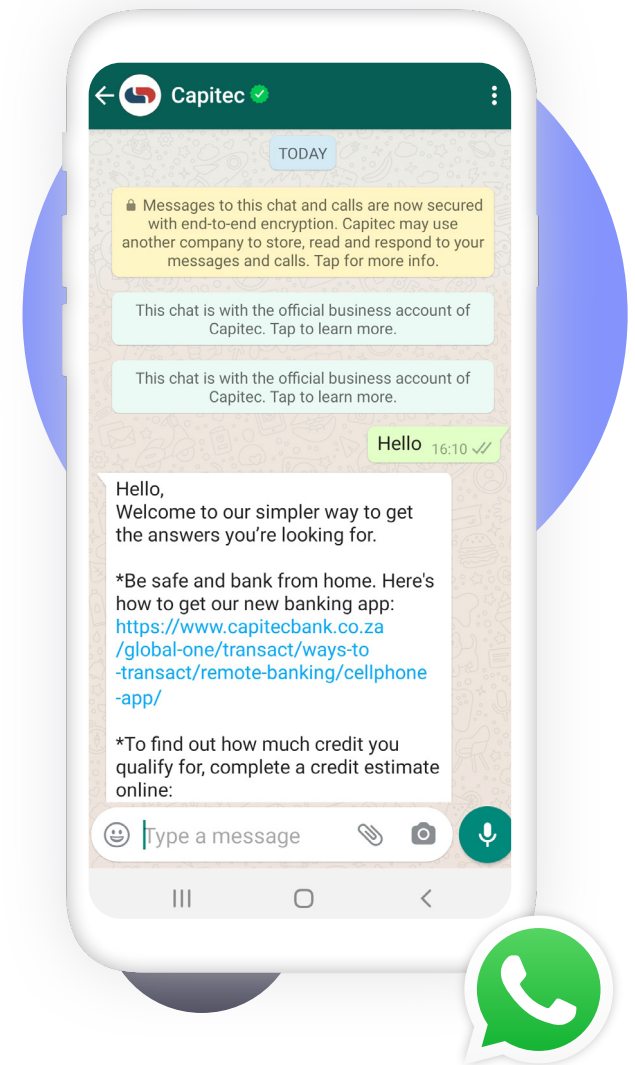
One of the most popular messaging apps in the world, WhatsApp, has 2 billion monthly users and sees 60 billion messages sent every day.

Since early 2018, brands have been using the WhatsApp Business API to engage and automate interactions with users. Automotive leaders such as Mercedes-Benz provide pre-sales and post-sales support through the channel, such as booking test drives and services. In other sectors, British Gas uses WhatsApp to provide customer support and npower provides information on smart meter installation.

The WhatsApp Business API offers several features, from quick replies to action buttons, that makes it a powerful rich messaging channel. A key USP is that, brands can proactively reach users once consent has been gained. The two conditions of gaining customer consent are that the user must trigger the opt-in and clear messaging of what they are signing up to receive.

The first type of message the API supports is a Highly Structured Message (HSM), which is typically used for alerts and transactional notifications. These communications are based on a defined template approved by WhatsApp, such as an account update or payment update, and can include dynamic parameters to personalize the interaction. The second type of message sent through the API is a Session Message. These messages are used to respond to customer-initiated conversations – this includes NLP, hybrid chatbot interactions, and live agent chat.

The WhatsApp Business API doesn't provide a user interface and brands are required to host and maintain API clients themselves. However, brands can avoid this hassle and accelerate deployment by working with one of the official WhatsApp Business solution providers.



Feature overview:

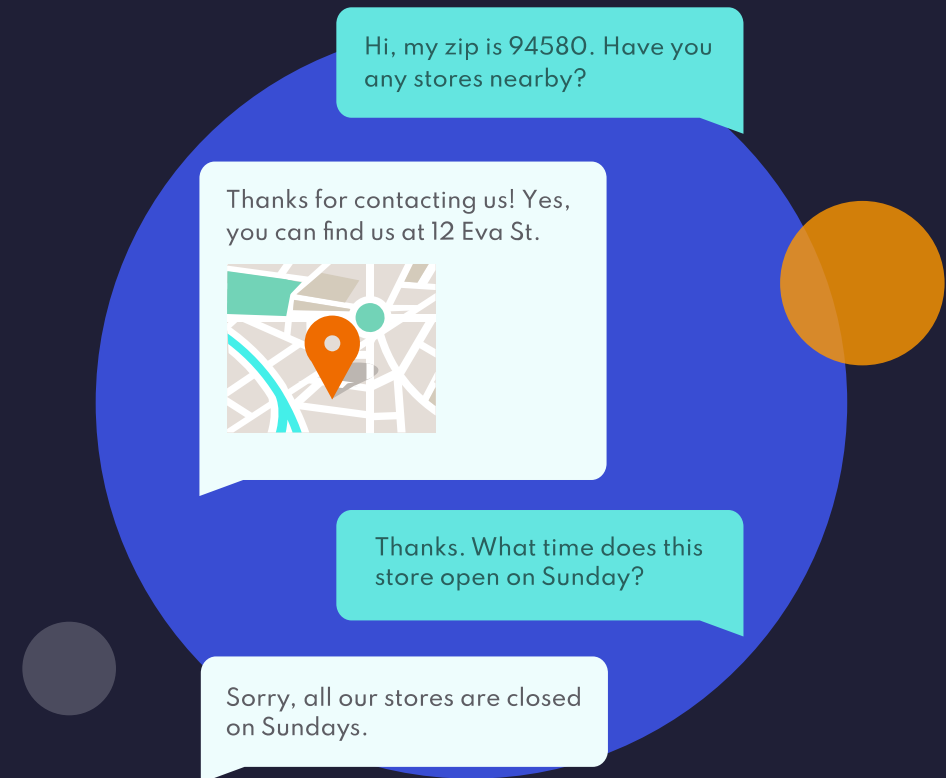
Verified business profiles that display brand name, logo, address, and a green checkmark badge.

Rich media that includes the ability to send and receive emojis, images, geolocation, and videos.

Read receipts to monitor whether a customer has read sent messages.

Stickers are animated emojis that can be personalized to a brand's style to convey emotions and reactions.

Call-to-action and **quick reply buttons** can be placed within message templates to drive customer action.



What are the implications for channels like SMS and push notifications?

Now that we've looked at the rich messaging channels transforming customer interactions, how will they impact traditional channels already used by most brands today? What will happen to channels such as SMS, email, push notifications, and in-app messaging?

Ultimately, the end-state for brands is enabling all services and orchestrating interactions across all channels - a connected, cross-channel experience.

A customer may receive a push notification about a new product deal, but they can enter Apple Business Chat to find out more information and make a purchase. A customer needs to be sent a fraud alert that needs an instant response -

a WhatsApp message is deployed first as it was the last channel used by the customer, and if no response is gained, a follow-up SMS message is sent. There will be inbound interactions coming in through channels like Google's Business Messages while proactive outbound interactions will be deployed through RCS, WhatsApp, etc.

Yes, these channels will still form part of marketing, customer service, CRM, and other communication strategies for years to come. But, with the shift to conversational messaging, rich-messaging channels will start to be used more and more to create the engaging and interactive experiences that customers demand.



Getting started

Make every interaction matter with **imimobile**

It's exciting times for customer engagement – there are new channels, AI capabilities, automation, and opportunities to differentiate your brand experience. We know there's a lot to take in and you might already be in discussions about changing your communication strategy.

However, whether you're interested in automating FAQs to increase NPS, learning about conversational advertising, or want to engage customers across every channel, the experts at **imimobile** are here to help. Leading brands like Best Buy, Vodafone, Walgreens, and Barclays trust us to help them make every interaction matter for their clients, and you can too.

Get in touch and let's start a conversation.
We want to:

- **Review your business goals to suggest best practices**
- **Determine your technical implementation needs and barriers to success**
- **Show you how we can help, organize a demo and talk about next steps**

Let's get started. Email us at contactus@imimobile.com and we'll be in touch to answer questions and organize an introductory session.

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