achieving trusted consumer engagement

the new wave of rich business messaging, powered by RCS

Over 80 percent of smartphone users worldwide use text messaging at least once a month[1]. Now the mobile industry is building on the success of Short Message Service (SMS) with Rich Business Messaging, powered by Rich Communication Services (RCS). Rich business messaging ultimately promises the same inter-operator ubiquity as SMS, along with enhanced features that consumers use on internet messaging platforms, such as read receipts, video, group chat and paying for services. But for Rich business messaging to live up to its potential, service providers and businesses must provide consumers with the information they need to trust those chatbots and the conversations they represent.

Because rich business messages give businesses new ways to interact with customers, such as messaging embedded with multimedia carousels for browsing and buying products, there is also a need for an independent Verification Authority (VA) that would be responsible for authenticating the identity of businesses and their chatbots. These enhanced features of rich business messaging will significantly increase customer engagement compared to SMS. In fact, in a 2019 Vodafone trial[2] , 80 percent of customers read an RCS message, and 25 percent responded to the offer. Other service providers report comparable results, according to the GSMA[3] : "The application-to-person (A2P) use cases have been especially successful, with open rates of 85 percent plus, and click-through rates that are over 40 percent more than comparable campaigns by SMS."

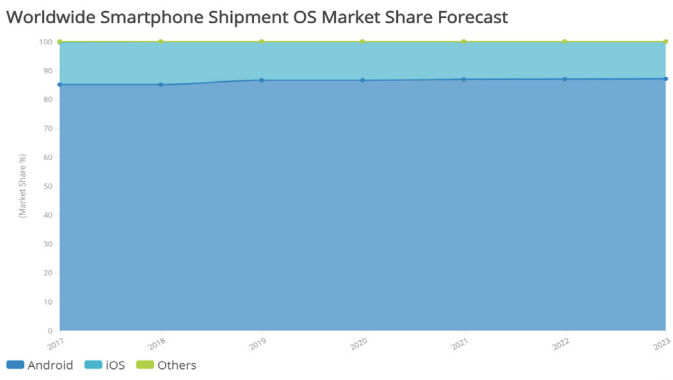
And that's just the start. "Future growth of RCS traffic will be driven by users migrating away from dedicated mobile apps," says Sam Barker, Juniper Research lead analyst[4]. "The technology will develop to become the first point of contact for RCS users to engage with brands over mobile devices within 5 years."

That outlook might surprise some people, considering the misconception that the RCS standard is struggling for support among service providers, device vendors, businesses and consumers. Here's an impartial summary of where RCS adoption stands today, where it's headed and why trust is key for ensuring that it lives up to its potential, especially when it comes to business-to-consumer messaging.

[1] https://www.gsmaintelligence.com/research/2019/02/the-mobile-economy-2019/731/
[2] https://www.mobileindustryeye.com/imimobile/case-study-vodafone-customer-engagement-soars-with-rcs-messaging-campaign/
[3] https://www.gsma.com/futurenetworks
[4] https://www.juniperresearch.com/press/press-releases/a2p-business-messages-to-reach-3-5-tn-2023

RCS is here—and here to stay

The RCS isn't the future. It's the present.
Approximately 100 service providers worldwide have launched RCS, and that number continues to grow each quarter, according to the GSMA . Currently, more than 360 million people use RCS. In November 2019, Google made RCS the primary messaging platform for Android, which is used by 87 percent of the world's smartphones, according to IDC . Clearly, RCS is already becoming a mainstream phenomenon.



IDC Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker, Q4 2019[5]

Major brands are using RCS
Barclays, Booking.com, Four Seasons, Subway and Toyota are among the major brands already using RCS to provide their customers with a richer, more interactive experience. One décor retailer used RCS to provide carousels of images and videos — "a world away from a brief description and perhaps a link, as might have been possible with an equivalent SMS campaign," the GSMA says. "The RCS campaigns delivered a 10-fold increase in click-through rates and a 115 percent increase in revenue." Small businesses also can leverage RCS to wow their customers and drive sales. GSMA Intelligence estimates[1] that by 2021, A2P RCS messaging will be a $74 billion market[3].

The RCS vendor ecosystem is large and mature
Dozens of companies[3] provide the network infrastructure, messaging as a platform (MaaP) services, hub connectivity, handset clients, aggregation services and other key components that enable RCS.

Interoperability is here, with even more on the way
One example is the Cross Carrier Messaging Initiative[6], a joint venture between AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon. Another is the GSMA's Universal Profile, which enables features such as capability discovery, chat, group chat, file transfer, audio messaging, video share, location share, live sketching and more. The Universal Profile is expected to spur even more RCS adoption "by enabling operators, OEMs and operating system providers to deliver this exciting new messaging service consistently, quickly and simply," the GSMA says[3].

[3] https://www.gsma.com/futurenetworks
[6] https://www.idc.com/promo/smartphone-market-share/os
[6] https://www.t-mobile.com/news/ccmi

trust is critical

One thing to be wary of is that just like voice calls, text messages and email, the more consumers use RCS, the more attractive it becomes to fraudsters. Research shows that consumers are increasingly distrustful of traditional communications — including SMS and voice calls — because of illegal robocalling, robotexting and other types of spam. In fact, the FCC reported that between 40-50 percent of all calls to U.S. mobile phones in 2019 were expected to be scams[7]. In a Mobile Ecosystem Forum survey[15], service providers estimated that an average of 9.4 percent of A2P SMS revenue is lost to fraud.

Given that rich business messaging will be an open ecosystem for businesses of all shapes and sizes, it is expected that huge volumes of both verified and unverified business chatbots will be active on any given service provider network at any given time. That's why there needs to be a way to verify each sender's identity. Without that capability, the consumer will have no idea when to trust those messages, and fraudsters may be even more likely to try to compromise the service, thus undermining the reach and effectiveness of rich business messaging.

As a new technology, RCS has the opportunity to get it right — right from the beginning — by building in verification and authentication. These capabilities are key for getting consumers to trust rich business messaging content. The more they can trust it, the more valuable it becomes as a customer-engagement platform for businesses.

RCS verified sender for rich business messaging

The good news is that service providers and businesses do have options for providing consumers with the information they need to trust RCS-based rich business messages. The GSMA's RCS Verified Sender initiative[3], for instance, establishes trust in business-to-consumer messaging by providing a framework that verifies the business sender's identity.

This option calls for a VA to authenticate the identity of each business that wants to send rich messages. The VA would also verify the chatbots used by the business and would register the information into a system that shares the business' logos and other enhanced caller-ID information with each participating platform provider. This information would be digitally signed by the VA, which will help mitigate the risk of spoofing or impersonation of chatbots by fraudsters during the registration process. Verified sender content could then be presented with an icon, such as a check mark, at the top to further emphasize that the sender has been verified. The service provider could also deliver this information with the sender's business name and logo so that the recipient could feel more confident that the business is legitimate and the content is authentic.

iconectiv TruReach Intel

iconectiv® TruReach Intel[17] provides VA services, as well, as a variety of additional tools to help the rich business messaging ecosystem manage trust at scale. It is a neutral and secure service that helps distinguish those business messages that are coming from verified senders. Those messages can then be presented to consumers as legitimate and trusted. Service providers can use this software as a service (SaaS) solution to allow businesses to access their networks where messages and chatbots from legitimate businesses can be authenticated and verified. TruReach Intel also supports voice calls and SMS, making it a comprehensive solution for omni-channel trust for customer engagement.

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[7] https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-356196A1.pdf
[8] https://www.anam.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/A2P-Monetisation-Report_-November-2018.pdf.

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