



# Short Codes: Definition, Use Cases, and Best Practices

SMS/MMS messaging has proven to be a valuable tool for notifying existing clients of new promotions or specials or simply growing new business. Whether a client opts for a local number or a short code to relay their marketing message depends largely on their business type. We are seeing a high level of growth in the short code space and understanding expectations and the approval process for these codes can go a long way to launching new campaigns successfully.

## Short Code Use Cases

Short codes can be used in a variety of business settings. Some typical uses include appointment reminders, promotions and

coupons, client loyalty programs, event announcements, and reservations.

Whether a client chooses to use a local number or a short code really depends on the type of business and whether there is a need to convey a “local” presence in the community.

### Examples of Short Code Vertical Uses

Hotel Chains

Schools

Airlines

Hair Salons

Emergency Alerts

Restaurant Reservations

Delivery Services

2-Factor Authentication

SMS Mobile Donations

Voting/Polling/Surveys

## Short Code Provisioning

All participating mobile carriers review and approve the short code brief and the program(s) associated with its use before it can be operable over mobile networks. Once a short code is active, carriers perform routine audits on all components of its SMS programs to ensure ongoing compliance. Deployment time frames can vary, but a standard new short code can take between 6-12 weeks before it is live and able to be used in a campaign. Client response is a key element in the Short Code Provisioning Process. Be mindful that any delays in response to any requested changes will only prolong the approval process.

Mobile carriers review the following elements prior to and after approving a short code:

- Program call-to-action (CTA)
- Opt-in mechanisms
- Program message flow
- Program terms and conditions

### PROGRAM CALL-TO-ACTION (CTA)

Having an effective call-to-action (CTA) is a springboard to a successful short code program. A CTA both describes a mobile program and provides opt-in instructions to potential users. The carriers' ultimate goal is to promote a consistent end-user experience across all short code programs.

The required components of a successful CTA differ depending on the media in which it's published. However, there are certain aspects that carriers look for in all CTAs:

- Sponsor name, program name, description, and text message frequency (per day, week, or month)
- Linked text or full URL to terms and conditions of the program, including privacy policy and STOP/HELP information
- Opt-in instructions
- Opt-out instructions
- HELP instructions or customer support information
- Additional carrier cost disclosure, one of two variations:
  - "Message and data rates may apply."
  - "Msg&data rates may apply."

Carriers also look for the following items, as they are not permissible and would result in declination of service:

- Blanket opt-ins (shared CTAs) with other channels
- Mentions of affiliates or affiliate marketing
- Selling or sharing of user information

## SAMPLE SHORT CODE CTA'S:

Sample Web CTA	Sample Keyword CTA
<p>First Name*</p> <input type="text" value="Enter Your First Name"/>	<p>Text <b>COUPON</b> to 12345 for 50% off your next purchase</p> <p><small>By clicking submit I understand that my click is my electronic signature, and authorize [Company Name] to send a <b>recurring</b> 3 msg/week with information regarding [Program Name and Description] via sms/text messaging from XXXXX, to my mobile phone. Text <b>STOP</b> to cancel and <b>HELP</b> for help. <b>Msg&amp;data rates may apply.</b> I understand that my consent is not a condition of using the service(s) provided on this website.</small></p> <p><a href="#">Terms &amp; Conditions</a>   <a href="#">Privacy Policy</a></p>
<p>Last Name*</p> <input type="text" value="Enter Your Last Name"/>	
<p>Phone Number*</p> <input type="text" value="Enter Your Phone Number"/>	
<p><small>By clicking submit I understand that my click is my electronic signature, and authorize [Company Name] to send a <b>recurring</b> 3 msg/week with information regarding [Program Name and Description] via sms/text messaging from XXXXX, to my mobile phone. Text <b>STOP</b> to cancel and <b>HELP</b> for help. <b>Msg&amp;data rates may apply.</b> I understand that my consent is not a condition of using the service(s) provided on this website.</small></p> <p><a href="#">Terms &amp; Conditions</a>   <a href="#">Privacy Policy</a></p> <p><b>Submit</b></p>	

### OPT-IN MECHANISMS

Express written consent is a requirement for short code approval. Previous rules allowed businesses with provable existing customer relationships to forgo consent, such as if the customer made a prior purchase. Now all marketing SMS must have express written consent to be considered compliant. Written consent can be in the form of a text message (keyword opt-in) or an online form.

Verbal consent to join an SMS campaign is no longer acceptable. Neither is requiring consumer consent as a condition of purchase.

The CTIA states acceptable opt-in mechanisms include:

- Entering a phone number online
- Clicking a button on a mobile web page

- Sending a mobile originated (MO) message containing an advertising keyword
- Signing up at a point-of-sale (POS) location
- Opting in over the phone using interactive voice response (IVR) technology

The CTIA mandates that each service user maintain their positive opt-in records. A positive record proves the subscriber was provided the necessary campaign information throughout the opt-in process.

This includes the recipient's first exposure to the SMS campaign as well as opt-in and confirmation transactions. SMS marketers should keep electronic records of all transactions.

## PROGRAM MESSAGE FLOW

Each short code program contains its own messaging template components. Template content is submitted with the program application for carrier review. There are three message flows with their own requirements: one-time message, recurring message, and two-factor authentication.

### ONE-TIME MESSAGES

Also called “transactional” or “non-recurring” service, a one-time message program is one in which the end-user texts in a keyword or submits a web prompt to receive the desired response instantly. End-users won't receive any future messages from the service unless they text in or otherwise engage the service again.

#### *Example: Ytel Status*

**Check your account status:**  
**<https://shortenedurl.wh>**  
**Reply STOP to cancel.**

### RECURRING MESSAGES

End-users who opt into a recurring or “subscription-based” mobile program elect to receive messages at regular or event-triggered intervals over a given or indefinite period of time.

Unlike one-time message programs, recurring messages must display opt-out instructions at program opt-in and in content or service messages at regular intervals of at least once per month.

#### *Example: Ytel Loyalty*

**Customer appreciation day! Text**  
**THANKS to 33679 to receive**  
**\$100 credit on your account**  
**today. Reply STOP to cancel.**

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Terms and conditions are guidelines for how subscribers use a short code program and must be advertised in the CTA. The full terms and conditions for the short code program must be published and/or web accessible.

While multiple programs' terms and conditions can share the same page, each program must individually meet all of the requirements. These mobile terms and conditions may be hosted on their own page or included within a distinct section of the company's overall terms and conditions. The following components are required for terms and conditions.

## SPONSOR INFORMATION AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program name, company name, and/or brand associated with the campaign should be identified and consistently referenced throughout. A description of what the program is and what service(s) it provides must also be displayed, without any deceptive advertising.

## CALL TO ACTION

Most terms and conditions pages require simple opt-in instructions (e.g., “send KEYWORD to 411411”). However, if the end-user will receive a phone call as a result of opting in, a full CTA is required on the terms and conditions page.

## STATEMENT OF RECURRENCE

Programs that send messages continually to subscribers after they opt-in, without further prompting, must be called “recurring” and feature message frequency disclaimers. The word or phrase with “recurring” should be bolded for easy location.

### *Example: Ytel Alert*

***“Ytel Alerts Software and Services applications will send recurring 1 msg per week. The mobile carriers are not liable for delayed or undelivered messages.”***

## ADDITIONAL CARRIER COST DISCLOSURE

The phrase “message and data rates may apply,” or “Msg&DataRatesMayApply,” must appear in the terms and conditions. Carriers’ standard messaging rates apply to all short code programs. Previously, the phrase “standard rates may apply” was used, but it’s no longer accepted.

## ACTIVE KEYWORDS

All active keywords should be listed in the program’s terms and conditions, including the opt-in keyword, any action keywords, and universal ones like STOP and HELP. If keywords are associated with different programs, separate terms and conditions pages for each program are recommended.

## OPT-OUT MECHANISMS

Functioning opt-out mechanisms are crucial for all text messaging programs. Short code programs must respond to the universal keywords STOP, END, CANCEL, UNSUBSCRIBE, and QUIT for opting out. Only the STOP functionality must be described in the terms and conditions. Opt-out information no longer need appear in bold typeface.

## CUSTOMER SUPPORT INFORMATION

Customer support information must be clear and readily available to help subscribers understand the program details and their status with the program. Customer support information includes a toll-free number, email address, and/or web submission form.

Instructions on using the HELP keyword (e.g., “text HELP for help”) may be provided in lieu of full customer service contact information in advertising materials.

## LINK TO PRIVACY POLICY

Service providers are responsible for protecting the privacy of user information and must comply with applicable privacy laws. The privacy policy linked in the terms and conditions can be a general company policy and doesn't have to be mobile program specific.

## CAMPAIGNS PROHIBITED

While short code messaging campaigns are a great fit for certain industries, there are some business and campaign types that are inherently Non-Compliant and will likely not be viewed as a viable option for short code use. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with a few of these campaign types:

- Loan advertisements with the exception of messages from direct lenders for secured loans
- Credit repair
- Debt relief
- Work from home, ‘secret shopper’, and similar advertising campaigns
- Lead generation campaigns that indicate the sharing of collected information with third parties
- Campaign types not in compliance with recommendations of or prohibited by the CTIA Short Code Monitoring Handbook, Version 1.7 or later.
- Additional campaign types at carrier discretion

## MESSAGING PROHIBITED

Ytel prides itself in presenting a service that is compliant and operates within CTIA guidelines in every capacity. Unsolicited and non-compliant or fraudulent messaging is not tolerated on the Ytel network. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with some examples of “non-compliant” messaging that will in almost every case result in a short code campaign being shut down:

- Message content that deceives or threatens consumers is not permitted
- Message streams that result in excessive

complaints or STOP commands typically indicate an unwanted message campaign and will not be allowed to continue

- Phishing
- Fraud or scams
- Deceptive marketing
- Distribution of malware or app downloads from non-secure locations
- Loan, debt consolidation, debt relief and student loan programs from any enterprise that is not able to grant loans itself; affiliate lead generation for these financial programs are prohibited
- Affiliate marketing programs that seek to obtain opt-in subscriber lists
- Additional messaging types at carrier discretion

## ***Short Code Approval Timelines***

A short code program can take weeks to be ready. Your responsiveness is key to keeping things moving. In addition to the program compliance steps outlined below, carriers have to connect the new number to mobile networks. This process takes time.

### **1. Short Code Application with Ytel**

**2. Compliance Review (1-3 days):** Ytel reviews the service user application and works with the business to refine the short

code program for carrier submission. This is the first step requiring service user attentiveness to keep the process moving.

### **3. Carrier Review (4-8 weeks):**

- Ytel submits the service user application to carriers
- Carriers review the service user application and CTA, opt-in mechanisms, message flow, and required disclosures
- Ytel answers questions that carriers have and works closely with the service user to ensure program compliance
- Prompt customer responsive regarding any changes is key to keep the approval process moving
- Carriers connect the short code to mobile networks
- Carriers give final approval

**4. Template Build (1 day):** Ytel builds the service user's message flows to test the short code and keyword functionalities.

**5. Approval:** Ytel informs the service user the short code is approved and active.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SPEED UP THE APPROVAL PROCESS:

The compliance check and carrier review steps require close customer participation to complete. During the compliance check, Ytel will make recommendations to improve the program for carrier review. This includes suggesting proper verbiage and formatting. Once Ytel makes its recommendations, customers must make the changes and resubmit them for review.

Any hesitation in returning the recommended changes will delay approval. While Ytel works with customers during all phases, only customers can make the necessary changes to bring their programs into compliance. Sometimes minor changes to the verbiage in a customer's call-to-action or Terms and Conditions are necessary to obtain carrier approval on the short code.

### About Ytel

Ytel communication solutions enable businesses and developers to easily build SMS and voice capabilities into any application. Our communication APIs improve the customer experience and drive operational efficiency. As an enterprise carrier in the cloud, Ytel improves the speed and deliverability of your conversational business messaging without compromising security. Founded in 2012, Ytel delivers more than 1 billion monthly messages to help businesses grow revenue and build brand equity.



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