

## Things go better with SMS

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LAST year, 130,000 SMS messages poured out of Coca-Cola Amatil's 240-seat contact centre in Sydney, bound for the mobile handsets of the company's 600-odd field workers.

Contact centre staff did not use phones to send the messages, instead keying them into emails relayed to Amatil's mobile sales force and drink vending machine service technicians.

Amatil infrastructure team leader Jane Healy says the close collaboration between field agents and contact centre staff is a key advantage of the system.

"The reason we moved to that system is that it allows us to have a permanent one-on-one SMS relationship with our field force," she says.

The system, called MessageNet, is used mainly by contact centre staff who make weekly calls to customers in particular areas.

In the field, there is also a sales representative for each region.

The agent sends an SMS to the sales rep or technician through Lotus Notes, and MessageNet sends back an acknowledgment of its receipt.

Healy says other benefits include speed and certainty of contact between the contact centre and field agent.

Communication is instant.

"They don't have to bother each other with phoning and leaving voice mail and not being able to get hold of them," she says.

Healy says Amatil buys MessageNet capacity in bulk lots of 50,000.

The company sent 17,000 messages in January, Coca-Cola's summer "hot month", and another 11,000 in February.

It generally takes three to four months to use 50,000 messages.

"Obviously it has been extremely well received by the business," she says.

Amatil seems to have cottoned on to the cost savings available from SMS messaging.

Rohan Lean, managing director of FreeRein, which introduced MessageNet to Australia, says 30 per cent to 40 per cent of an organisation's telecommunications bill can come from landline-to-mobile charges.

These calls usually cost at least \$1, whereas an SMS call costs about 16c, Lean

says.

Despite cost advantages, Healy says, contact centre agents are not forced to use SMS only.

"All we're doing is providing another facility as a way to get through to our field force," she says.

"It provides flexibility."

Before installing MessageNet, Amatil used a different version of the system that worked through a single account attached to a modem and PC, but it didn't allow field agents to send SMSs to the contact centre.

"It would just fire out calls from one server," Healy says.

"You could SMS back to that server but it would just go to one account."

Opening a firewall port to MessageNet allowed staff to send SMSs over the MessageNet network.

"We didn't have to install any software at all on our network," she says.

At the back end, Amatil can see every SMS received, a boon for quality control.

Healy says there is no down side, it is easy to use and no training is needed.

It is, however, open to all mobiles, so it could be abused.

Amatil has used SMS in a recent marketing campaign, in which known customers were notified of specials.

"We organised that with MessageNet and it helped us set up the campaign," Healy says.

The system has also been used to retrieve crucial technical feedback from field workers, who were sent an SMS survey, data from which was collated by MessageNet and fed back to Amatil.

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