

Text messaging turns 20

One of the information age's biggest successes has celebrated its 20th birthday. The very first, simple, text message was sent on December 3rd, 1992. It was sent by software engineer Neil Papworth to his boss at the British mobile phone operator Vodafone. It read simply, "Merry Christmas". Little did they know that their humble mode of communication would take the world by storm. SMS (Short Message Service) is today a multi-billion-dollar industry covering every corner of the globe. An estimated nine trillion text messages are sent globally each year. Everyone from presidents to schoolchildren to villagers in remote parts of developing countries relies on it to communicate.

SMS is now an integral part of daily life for most of us. It is the preferred method of communication between family members. One study showed that the average American teenager sends up to 60 texts a day. It has also spawned countless original and innovative business strategies from sending cash overseas to voting in online polls. However, SMS has also been blamed for a decline in language ability and an increase in traffic accidents. A new sub-language has spread worldwide as texters find shortcuts to write their messages as quickly as possible using the fewest possible characters. Texting shorthand such as LOL (laugh out loud) and OMG (oh my god) has even entered the Oxford English Dictionary.

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