

Traditional Text Messages Are Finally Changing

Rich Communication Services Now Available to Android Users in UK, France

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Traditional text messages may (finally) be getting an overhaul. In June, Google **announced** that it will allow Android users in the UK and France to opt in to Rich Communication Services (RCS), the new texting standard intended to replace the current SMS protocol. That's a step forward for RCS, which has been off to a slow start, but it's not likely to mean much for consumers or marketers yet.

So, what is RCS and how could it affect consumers and marketers?

RCS is the next generation of text messages. Instead of relying on cellular service, messages will be sent over a data connection and support additional functionalities like read receipts, audio/video messaging, typing indicators and group chats. In short, it will turn traditional texting into a similar experience as Apple's iMessage or other over-the-top (OTT) messaging apps like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.

It's also supposed to be hardware-agnostic, meaning it will work across devices from different manufacturers. That includes iPhones, but Apple has yet to confirm whether it will support RCS.

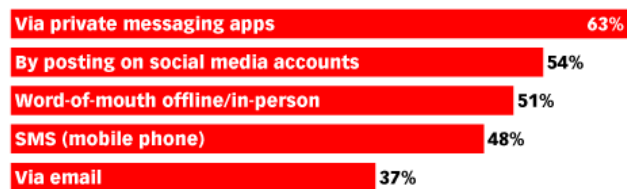
"RCS should provide consumers with another option for sending more content-rich messages to friends and family, including video as well as

geolocation sharing and group chat," said Melanie Cohn, senior manager of brand engagement at Dunkin' Brands.

Despite the growing popularity of OTT messaging apps, SMS is still common. Roughly half (48%) of US and UK internet users surveyed by GlobalWebIndex in Q1 2019 said they typically shared content with their peers via SMS.

How Do US/UK Internet Users Typically Share Content with Peers?

% of respondents, Q1 2019



Note: n=3,139 ages 16-64

Source: GlobalWebIndex, "Social Flagship Report 2019," July 2, 2019

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Brands and marketers could also benefit. "RCS will add another touchpoint for mobile marketing and messaging," said Sammy Tran, senior email marketing manager at digital marketing agency MuteSix. "The new features will increase the ability to personalize messages, which is key when communicating with customers via mobile. As long as consumers are opting into the service, it could become almost as valuable as an email list for marketers."

Why has RCS adoption been so slow?

The need to opt in to RCS is one roadblock for its adoption. Unlike iMessage, which is the default messaging service between iPhones, consumers will have to opt in to RCS messaging. On Google phones that support RCS, users are now prompted to upgrade to RCS (called Chat) when they open the Android Messages app. For many, that is probably also the first time they've heard of the service.

Another hurdle RCS still has to overcome is carrier adoption. [GSMA estimates](#) that just 79 mobile operators worldwide supported RCS as of mid-2019. By Q1 2020, that figure will rise to 135.

Google bypassed the need for network support of RCS when it offered the service directly to Android users in the UK and France. If it does the same in other countries, that could speed up RCS adoption. Android devices will account for 86.7% of global smartphone shipments in 2019 and 87.1% in 2023, according to a May 2019 forecast from the International Data Corporation (IDC).

Smartphone Shipments Worldwide, by OS, 2019 & 2023
millions, % of total and CAGR

	2019	% of total	2023	% of total	CAGR
Android	1,191.9	86.7%	1,324.1	87.1%	2.1%
iOS	183.5	13.3%	195.9	12.9%	-1.3%
Other	0.1	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	-43.6%
Total	1,375.5	100.0%	1,520	100.0%	1.6%

Source: International Data Corporation (IDC), "Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker" as cited in press release, May 30, 2019

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But then there's still the privacy issue. Messages sent on many OTT messaging apps, including iMessage and WhatsApp, are end-to-end encrypted, meaning they can't be read by anyone but the sender or recipient. RCS messages are not, though Google says it's working on a solution to provide more privacy to users.

Until it does, it could be difficult to convince consumers to use the service, especially as end-to-end encryption inches closer to industry standard. Facebook, for one, has made it **one of the six principles** of its "privacy-focused vision" and said it plans to encrypt messages on Instagram and Messenger as well.

How could RCS affect existing OTT mobile messaging apps?

Marketers interviewed for our upcoming report, "Global Messaging Apps 2019," had mixed feelings about how RCS could affect use of existing OTT mobile messaging apps. Having a built-in messaging service that can send messages across operating systems via a data connection could negate the need for a standalone app that serves the same purpose.

But many OTT messaging apps have additional features that will make them hard for consumers to give up completely.

"The eventual rollout of RCS will definitely impact users who use mobile messaging apps solely to send messages," said Chelsea McDonald, senior social media strategist at DEG Digital. "But consumers who use features that make those apps more of a social experience and not just one-to-one messaging are going to stick with what they know."

WhatsApp, for instance, has Status — disappearing photos and videos like those on Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and Snapchat Stories. WhatsApp Status had **more than** 500 million daily active users worldwide in Q1 2019, per Facebook. Then there's China's super-app WeChat, which allows its users to do almost anything from send a message to hail a ride or shop online.

"Mobile messaging services are going to have to get a lot more creative with new features as phone manufacturers and service carriers start competing in the space," said Akvile DeFazio, president of social media marketing agency AKvertise.

But there's still a long road ahead for a worldwide rollout of RCS, and until it's available more broadly, the impact on the mobile messaging app space is likely to be small.

For more analysis on messaging apps, be sure to read our [Global Messaging Apps 2019 report](#) when it publishes in September.