

The long and short of US business messaging

A complete guide to
short codes and 10DLC



Numbers in the spotlight

Sitting comfortably? We hope so. Because if you use mobile messaging to connect with customers or employees, you need to understand which phone numbers you should use.

Here's why.

The numbers approved by US carriers for business messaging have different capabilities and rules governing their use. Depending on your messaging use case and budget, each type of number has its own pros and cons.

Short codes and A2P 10DLC (10-digit long codes) are the most important 'types' of numbers that are approved for use by the US carriers – the guardians of the US mobile messaging ecosystem.

As the title of this guide suggests, there's far more to explain.

So dive in for the full story.



A2P messaging explained

A2P (application-to-person) messaging refers to any kind of mobile messaging that originates from an application. Think of it as a slightly confusing industry term for automated business-to-consumer messaging.



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A short history of US business messaging

Long codes and short codes

During the meteoric rise in popularity of business mobile messaging over the past decade, two primary ‘types’ of phone number have been relied on: US long codes and short codes.

Long codes

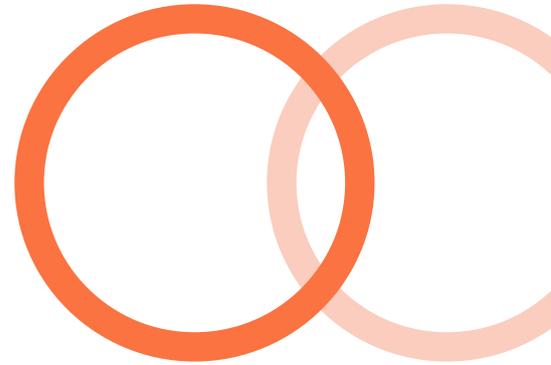
US long codes are cell-phone numbers that were only ever designed for person-to-person (P2P) communications. US carriers have always considered them to be unsanctioned for A2P messaging. For this reason, P2P long codes were subject to blocking and throttling.

Long codes are cheap to use, lack desirable security standards, and have low volume ‘throughput’ of one transaction per second (1 TPS). To increase throughput, businesses often use many of these numbers at once.

Short codes

Short codes, on the other hand, are five or six-digit numbers designed to support automated messaging to potentially large audiences. They have a high throughput – sometimes up to 1,000 TPS (transactions per second).

They’re approved for A2P use by the carriers, which means they’re not at risk of being blocked. Short codes are the most effective and reliable way of messaging consumers. As such, businesses pay US carriers a premium to use them.



Shared short codes

Because short codes have a cost attached to them – \$500 to \$1,000 a month to lease – they have long been shared by many businesses at once. An SMS provider manages the code, then the brands that use it share the cost.

Each brand can differentiate itself by selecting its own unique SMS keywords. So when one of these brands texts a customer, the short code number (for example 98767) appears. When customers reply, they can address it with a keyword – for example, BOBSCARS 98767.

A dedicated short code, however, is used exclusively by one brand. No unique keywords are required.

Keeping messaging safe and reliable

Shared short codes, which can be used by thousands of brands at once, have long been seen by the US carriers as a spam and smishing risk. They'd much prefer each brand to have its own code so that that messages can be easily monitored.

A clampdown on P2P long codes and shared short codes

Over the past few years, the US carriers have been sending out warnings that they will phase out the use of shared short codes and P2P long codes. Very soon, carriers will enforce a migration of traffic from shared short codes and long codes designed for person-to-person use.

Long story short: it's time for brands that use P2P long codes and shared short codes to make a change.

Two options

Brands that want to message people now have two main options:

1 – A dedicated short code

A great choice for high-volume, measurable, brand-focused messaging.

2 – 10DLC (10-digit long codes)

A new carrier-approved long code that must also be registered by businesses before it is used. With 10DLC, you still get pretty high throughput at a lower cost.

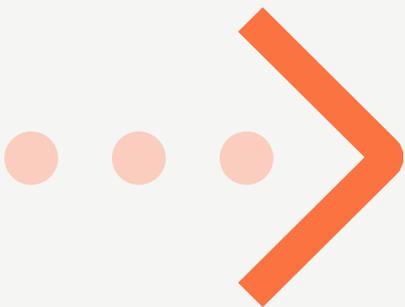
There is a third, less common option called text-enabled landlines and toll-free numbers. This is an approved type of messaging that allows businesses to convert their landlines so they can send and receive mobile messages as well as use voice.

For now, let's drill down into the benefits of short codes and 10DLC – then set out which should be used in which situation.

10DLC and short codes

Getting in touch with customers at just the right moment, with just the right experience, can make all the difference to your relationships.

The number you use to send and receive messages can be pivotal to this story. So let's take you through the characteristics and respective benefits of 10DLCs and dedicated short codes.



Short codes – the gold standard

Short codes can be used for sending and receiving messages (both SMS and MMS) between consumers and companies. Short codes are the gold standard of mobile messaging because they're memorable, trustworthy and let you send large numbers of messages at once. Let's drill down into their attributes.

Easy to remember

A **vanity short code** is a five to a six-digit number that is easy for people to remember – such as 54321. Similarly, a **premium short code** spells out phrases or brand names on a keyboard – for example, 262966 for 'Amazon' or 248724 for 'Church'. This is clearly useful for advertising a number online, on TV, or on a billboard.



Get a short code

You can lease a new short code (random, vanity or premium) or migrate your existing one through OpenMarket. We'll then manage the entire registration process for you.

The benefits of recognizable numbers don't stop there. Using them for high-value communications – such as two-factor authentication codes – can reassure consumers that the traffic is coming from a trusted source.

As the name suggests, a **random short code** is given to you at random. It may not be as easy to remember, but it's just as functional.

Trustworthy

Because short codes have to comply with strict vetting and carrier regulations, they can be trusted by customers. In fact, because of the clampdown on shared short codes, dedicated short codes could soon become totally disassociated from a spam risk. As mentioned, a vanity short code can be even more closely tied to the reputation of the business. Even random short codes can quickly become associated with brands.

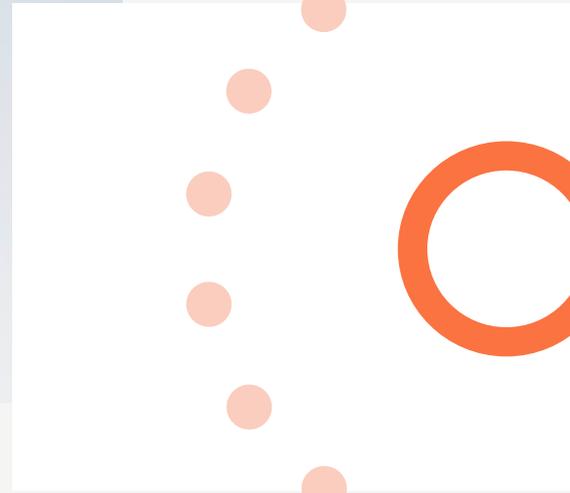
Branded Messaging – which lets you deliver SMS messages complete with your brand logo – is up there as the most verifiable type of messaging. But short codes are the next best thing in terms of offering customers good levels of trust and confidence.



Introducing Branded Messaging

Get noticed – and give your users a safe, verified messaging experience.

Discover



High volume

Short codes can deliver large volumes of messages in a short period of time – with a transaction per second (TPS) that starts at 100 and can rise to 1000 (and even higher). Great for time-sensitive communications to large audiences.

Reliable and secure

Short code messaging comes with high carrier support – meaning your messages are far more likely to safely arrive on time.

Delivery insights

Short codes also give you access to delivery receipts, so you know which messages have been delivered. Combine this insight with other messaging data analytics, and you can start optimizing your campaigns for maximum effect.

10DLC – a new A2P number

10DLC is essentially a long code that has been approved for business SMS and MMS messaging by US carriers. It looks the same as a P2P long code. In fact, customers won't be able to tell them apart.

Yet 10DLC has far more in common with a short code than a P2P long code.

Just like a short code, you need to register 10DLC numbers, and tell carriers what you're using them for. In return, your messages are sent on a carrier-approved route with the performance and security standards businesses need.

Here's what else you need to know about 10DLC.

Fast and straightforward

Provisioning and rolling out a 10DLC number can take you a few minutes if you use OpenMarket's self-service 10DLC tool (more on that below). There's almost no paperwork – and the hoops that carriers need you to jump through are largely automated.

Reliable

Because A2P 10DLC is sanctioned by mobile operators, there will be little or no blocking and throttling of messages – so your delivery rates will increase.

Low-cost

10DLC comes with low monthly costs, and low set-up costs than short codes.

Section 2.2

Call locally, anywhere in the world

You can choose a number or numbers for different area codes your business operates in.

Volume messaging

10DLC potentially has higher messaging throughput than P2P long code traffic – up to (and even above) 30 transactions per second as opposed to the 1 TPS that P2P long codes give you.

The TPS you receive depends on your brand and campaign meeting various criteria set by the carriers. As you'll find out in the next section, the carriers make assessments on what TPS you should receive in different ways.

So for now, your campaign will be limited by the lowest TPS made available to you by the carriers. However, in section 3, you'll find out how to ensure the throughput your use case receives meets your needs.

Your own number

With 10DLC, you get a dedicated number. This eliminates the risk of traffic being shut down as a result of bad traffic sent by a business that shares your short code. If you're used to using P2P long codes, you'll no longer need multiple numbers per use case to boost your throughput. In fact, this is forbidden by the carriers.

No delivery receipts

Mobile operators won't support delivery receipts on 10DLC. If you need delivery receipts to analyze the effectiveness of campaigns, you should turn to short codes.



Your choice

In summary, 10DLC is the messaging option for businesses that want to start messaging quickly and easily without the higher cost of short codes.

Our experts can talk you through a whole list of use cases that are appropriate. Here are some examples below (but there are many, many more).

- Two-factor authentication
- Appointment reminders
- Transport updates
- Product alerts
- Any small business that needs a localized presence

However, short codes should remain the preferred number for bigger brands that see the value of using a trusted, recognizable number. Short codes are also the best option for sending time-sensitive communications to large audiences.

[Get in touch](#)

Set up and provisioning made easy

Short code provisioning

The short code registration process is more detailed and drawn out than for 10DLC. The process is designed to help carriers ensure a short code is used appropriately.

You can lease a short code yourself directly from the Common Short Code Administration (or have OpenMarket obtain it for you).

Some of the information carriers require as part of the process includes:

- The use case
- How customers will sign up to receive messages
- Proof of the existence of support processes
 - such as “HELP” or “STOP” commands.
- Proposed solutions to any compliance issues



Short code provisioning

OpenMarket has helped the biggest brands in the world provision countless short codes over a decade or more. Our account managers and carrier relations specialists work closely with you to speed the process through in weeks (as opposed to the months it can take other SMS providers).

There are many other requirements and it can be tricky navigating the paperwork. It helps to have experts that are used to the process on your side.

Section 3

Once you complete the process, and the short code is activated on every carrier network, you'll be able to send and receive messages. If, in the future, you decide to change the SMS campaign or change how the short code is used, you must re-provision the short code for the new use. Failure to submit a new campaign brief will result in the termination of your SMS campaign by the carriers.

10DLC provisioning

For 10DLC, you'll need to register details like your brand (including address, contact details and other identifying details) and your 10DLC number and use case. However, the data can be automatically pushed to the campaign registry and carriers as part of the submission process.



10DLC setup

You can manage everything via OpenMarket's self-service 10DLC tool – called Numbers. Use it to:

- Search for and purchase multiple 10DLC numbers
- Migrate your existing long codes
- Register brand, campaign and use-case information
- File campaign briefs with the US carriers
- Obtain a trust score to increase throughput of your campaigns
- View status of campaigns and the 10DLCs assigned to them
- View a summary of all your 10DLCs (and all other originators)

Find out more about Numbers – our 10DLC self-service tool

[Check out Numbers](#)

Section 3

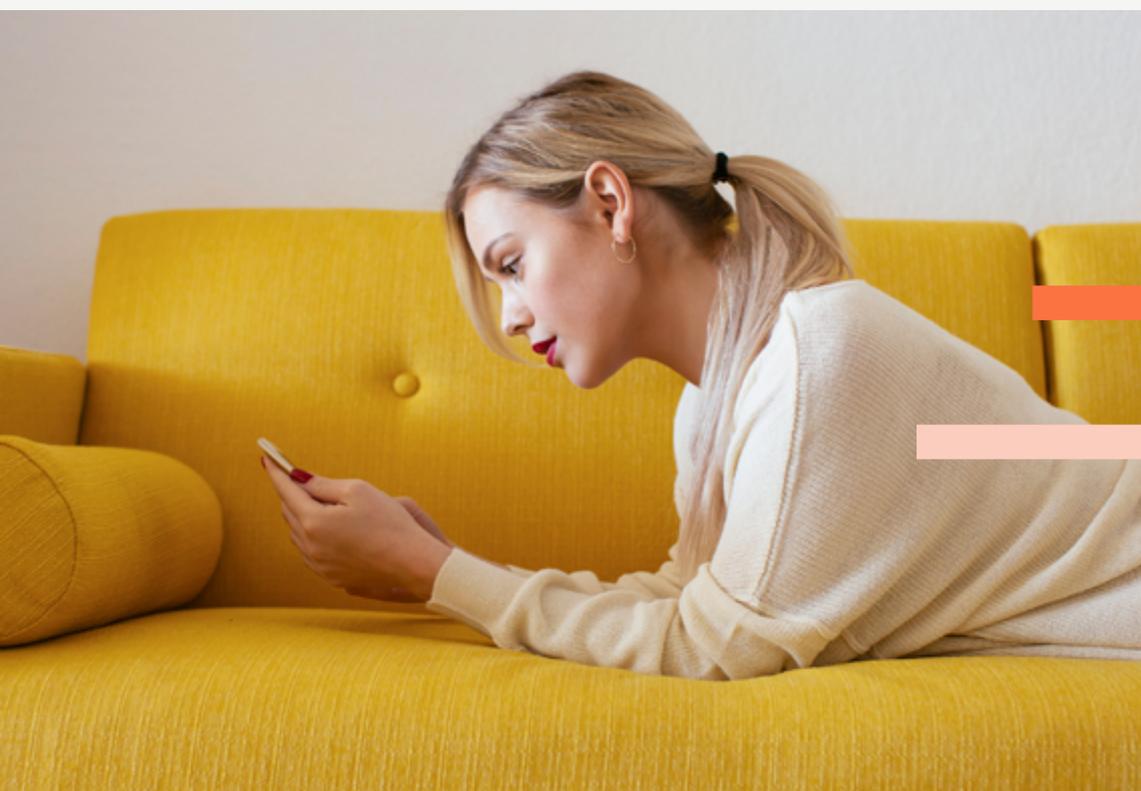
Vetting and throughput

The big US carriers are awarding throughput for each campaign based on various criteria including the type of business and the type of use case. You might also be required to undergo vetting to assess the likely risk you pose to the messaging ecosystem.

An example of a use case likely to receive a high trust score would be SMS-based two-factor authentication (2FA). This is because consumers have asked for this traffic, they respond to it, and it's safe and necessary.

Promotional marketing campaigns by third-party affiliates would be on the other end of the scale. These are considered more likely to pose a spam risk. However, a marketing campaign run by a well-known brand with a good reputation is almost certainly likely to be considered safe traffic and should therefore receive a good score.

For up to date information on vetting, check out our blog post – **[What are 10DLC trust scores?](#)**



How to migrate your traffic

Migrating short codes

Short codes can be precious. When you spend a lot of time and money getting them known among customers, you'll want to bring them with you when you switch mobile messaging providers.

The actors involved

It's worth reminding ourselves that there are several parties involved in a short code migration:

1. You (the business that owns the short code).
2. Your former aggregator.
3. Us (your new aggregator).
4. Your customers' mobile carriers
– all of which have different migration processes.

Coordination is the key to migration success.

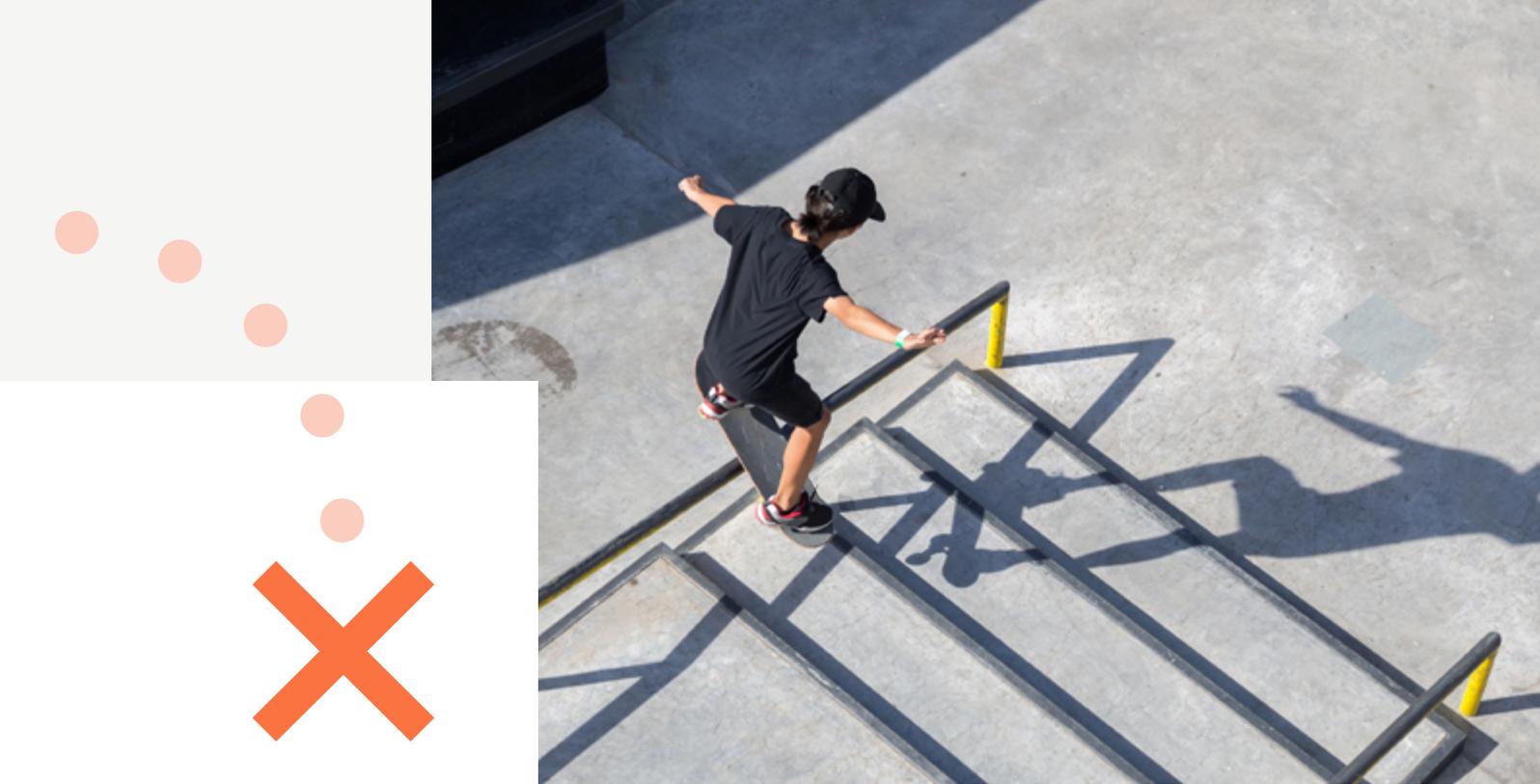


Migrate your codes

OpenMarket delivers the smoothest short code migration in the business. We coordinate with each carrier on your behalf, provide tools to support the process, and generally ensure you avoid downtime and undelivered messages.

The process can be completed within two to four weeks if everything runs smoothly – far quicker than most aggregators can manage.

How? Because we have close relationships with all the major US carriers and know the process and potential pitfalls inside out.



Migrating 10DLC numbers

10DLC aren't like old long codes. The registration and setup process is more complex, involving registration and vetting for 'trust scores'.

If you have some advertising budget behind a code, or you are using them for voice services, you could migrate these P2P numbers to A2P 10DLC. The OpenMarket team can help you with this.

However, if there is no reason to keep a specific number, it will be quicker, easier and cheaper to start afresh with new 10DLC numbers.

Check out our [**10DLC tips document**](#) for more information.

Conclusion

Your next steps

At OpenMarket, we're here to help our customers and partners pivot and move forward as these changes take effect. We're also here to help smooth out any migrations from shared short codes. We provide the tools, solutions, strategic advice and network access you need, while leveraging our close relationships with all the major US carriers to represent the interests of businesses.

If you need any help or advice, just drop us a line below. Or if you're an existing customer or partner, get in touch with your account manager any time.

[Get in touch](#)

We are OpenMarket

As an Infobip company, we help the biggest brands in the world use mobile messaging to connect with people in the moments that count. When they need to be helpful and responsive in real time. When customer experience isn't just a buzzword, it's an obsession. We'd love to do the same for you.

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