

SMS becomes a business, healthcare tool

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SMS is used more in customer relationship management (CRM) in developing countries like SA than in other markets because more individuals have cellphones than internet access.

"This is why more innovative SMS applications are being developed in SA and the rest of Africa," said Pieter Streicher, MD of BulkSMS.

He said travel agents are keeping clients up to date with the progress of their bookings by SMS and airways companies are using it to issue flight booking codes. It is being used to alert customers about deliveries or that items are ready for collection, remind them to pay bills, thank them for payment and inform them of progress with vehicle service.

He said banks are using SMS to alert customers about financial transactions going through their account and brokers are notifying customers when they buy and sell shares on their behalf.

Doctors and dentists are also using it to remind patients about appointments and about test results being available.

"In Kenya, individuals can subscribe to a list to be alerted about job vacancies."

It is as easy for website developers to add an automated SMS functionality to a website as it is to add e-mail functionality to it.

BulkSMS is providing a service to Safarinow.com, a bed-and breakfast portal that allows customers to post inquiries on a website and be informed about availability of bookings by SMS.

SMS is more efficient than other means of communication, says Streicher. For example, people are not always connected to the internet and are not always available to take phone calls.

Voice mail is not ideal either because people often do not listen to it, and messages are often indistinct because they have been recorded in a noisy environment or when the connection is bad, and recipients are often on the move.

"SMS speeds up two-way interaction that could otherwise take days and a lot of people are now using it instead of voice mail."

He said SMS is ideal for communicating queries that can be answered when convenient and information that needs to be

stored and used later, like a booking reference number.

Another advantage is its immediacy. It is less intrusive to answer an SMS than to take a call.

Streicher said if a number of customers need to be notified about a situation, such as problems with service delivery, it is more efficient to do this by SMS than to have a call centre inundated with calls.

He said bulk SMS is a lot cheaper in SA than in countries like the UK because of discount agreements between service providers and the cellular networks.

Streicher says businesses need to identify what services they can deliver by SMS to improve efficiencies and reduce costs.

Source: *Business Day*

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