

WHITEPAPER

RCS Messaging: What Every Digital Marketer Needs to Know



A TWO-MINUTE SUMMARY OF WHAT'S AHEAD...

RCS messaging (Rich Communications Services) is a game-changer for creating amazing experiences for your customers on mobile — no app required.

- Sometimes called the “new SMS,” RCS is rolling out rapidly. Since RCS messages can be sent to existing SMS lists, brands who are already using SMS will have a major advantage.
- Early results from brands trialing RCS have been incredibly impressive, with massive open and engagement rates. Consumer demand for RCS messaging is also high — a recent GSMA study shows 75% of consumers prefer RCS over SMS for interacting with brands.
- There are more tech tools available for marketers now than there have been...ever. And customer expectations for brands to deliver intuitive, personalized and downright magical experiences have never been higher.

Creating fantastic connections with customers on mobile is a critical capability for brands today. But the channels for engaging with customers on mobile are limited if they don't have your app.

For years, mobile wallet and SMS have offered a “no-app-required” way to engage with customers on mobile, and many brands are using them to create amazing customer experiences. But, for a lot of use cases, these channels have limitations that can be frustrating for brands and customers alike.

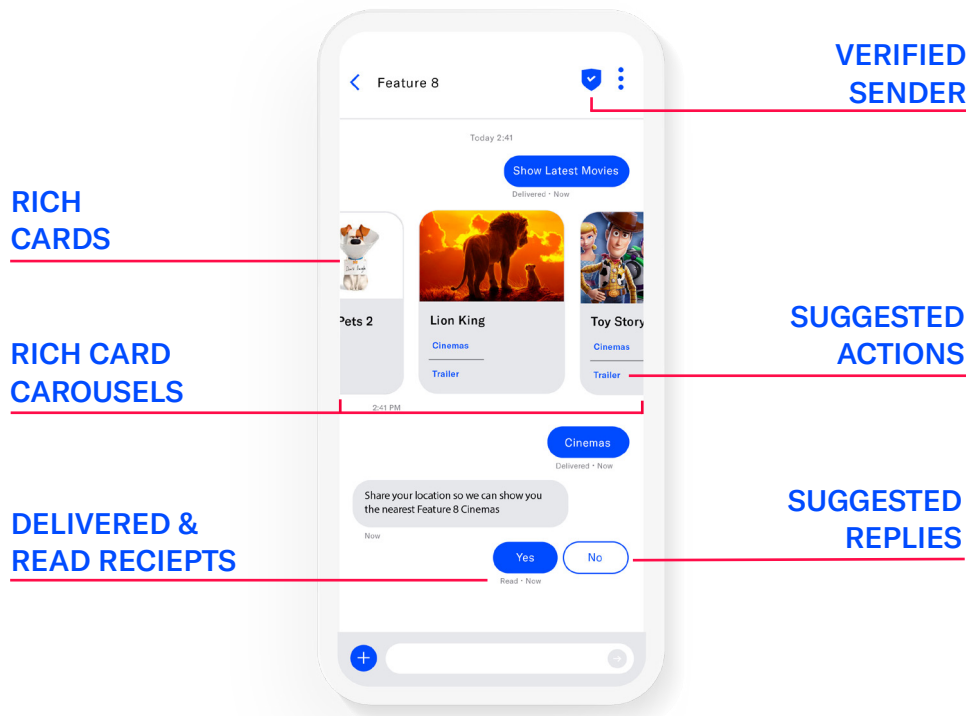
Enter the game changer: Rich Communication Services, commonly known as RCS.

WHAT IS RCS?

You can think of it as SMS 2.0.

With unprecedented open and response rates of [98% and 45%](#) respectively, brands have experienced the power of marketing through SMS for years. But with its character restrictions and lack of robust engagement features, SMS still has some significant limitations.

RCS is a giant leap forward. It essentially creates a way for brands to deliver rich, interactive app-like experiences within native mobile messaging. While SMS is restricted to plain text and hyperlinks, RCS allows for rich media and rich cards that customers can take action with directly. Brands can also supply



customers with suggested actions and replies to guide the customer journey based on their responses.

The end result is a beautiful, highly engaging customer experience you can offer to all of your customers — whether they have your app or not.

RCS FEATURES & FUNCTIONS

The power of RCS lies in its rich and interactive features.

- **Rich Cards:** Send high resolution images, videos, or audio files along with short text.
- **Rich Card Carousels:** Brands can put several rich cards together into a carousel that users can scroll through.
- **Delivered & Read Receipts:** Users can see when their messages are delivered and read — and even when the brand is typing back.
- **Verified Sender:** In order to start sending RCS messages, brands must first become a verified sender. This allows for brands to show up with their company name vs. just a number.
- **Suggested Actions:** Drive action from rich cards with deep links to your website, your app — or other apps like maps or calendars.

- **Suggested Replies:** Guide the user journey with buttons (also known as chips) beneath a message that users can simply tap rather than type out.

THE VALUE OF RCS FOR CUSTOMERS & BRANDS

With its rich and interactive feature set, RCS is poised to play a huge role in the future of mobile messaging, and drive massive value for customers and brands alike.

RCS Creates Value for Customers

Hopefully talking about the value of customer experience is preaching to the choir, but in a nutshell, CX is brand. CX has the power to make or break a customer's experience with your products and services, so getting it right is essential. With RCS, you've got the chance to create experiences that will truly wow your customers.

Here are just a few reasons RCS has significant value for your customers:

- **Fantastic experiences, no download required:** There's no need to search through app stores or download anything for a customer to start communicating with your brand.
- **Fast, frictionless interactions:** RCS makes interactivity easy and intuitive with suggested



replies and actions — like one-click purchasing — that make CX simpler and easier.

- **Personalized experience:** Messages are tailored based on customer preferences and previous actions for messages that will matter the most to your customer.
- **Immediate brand recognition:** Unlike SMS, where the sender displays as a number, RCS messages include your brand name as the sender, removing any confusion about who the message is from.

RCS Creates Value for Brands

When comparing SMS and RCS in terms of brand value — well there's really no comparison. RCS checks a lot of boxes SMS just can't.

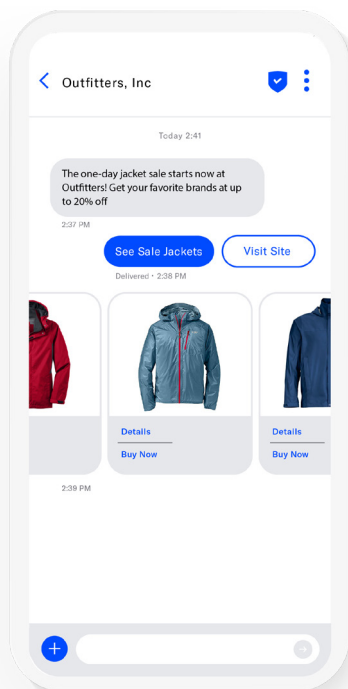
- **Create rich customer experiences on mobile — outside your app:** Reach the customers who have not downloaded your app and deliver engaging and interactive experiences within native mobile messaging- no download required.
- **Leverage the value of your existing SMS database:** If you're already engaging with

customers on SMS, you can start sending them RCS right away — no need to start from scratch in building out the audience for this channel.

- **Branded and verified experience:** Because RCS includes your brand's name as the sender — and because of the image-rich messages you can send — the RCS experience offers tons of opportunities for creating a fully branded piece of real estate on your customer's device.
- **Guide the customer journey:** Take your customers to the next level with suggested replies and actions that will help them accomplish their goals (purchase, subscription, etc.) more smoothly and quickly.
- **Get deeper engagement data:** When you offer more options for customers to take action, you're also getting more information about their preferences and how they want to engage with you. Unlike SMS, RCS offers a robust dataset you can use to get smarter about how, when and where you interact.

HOW TO INCORPORATE RCS IN YOUR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

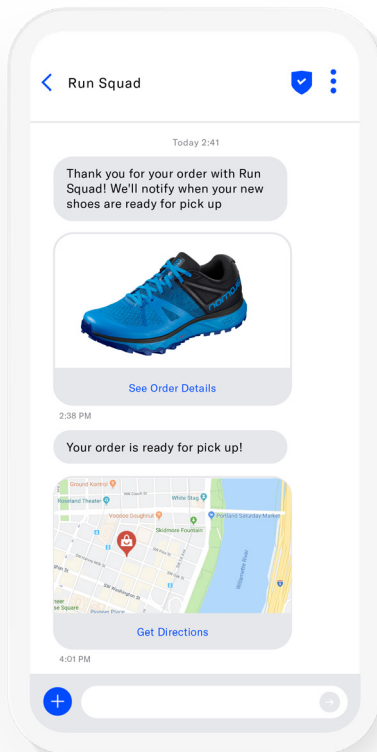
Some of the use cases for RCS are very similar to use cases for SMS — but RCS gives brands so many options for adding rich media, suggested replies, movement and interactivity. Here are some ideas to consider as you think about what kinds of RCS messaging experiences would be valuable for your customers and your brand:



Create a Full eCommerce Journey:

Send more personalized promotions based on customer locations and interests with RCS messaging that promotes a sales event. You can even offer one-tap directions to the location and one-tap “add to calendar.” Then optimize a full ecommerce journey, including one-tap purchase, pre-order or reservation buttons to drive frictionless sales.



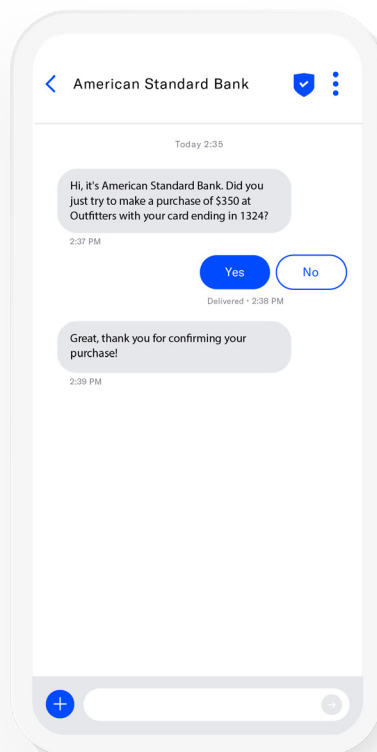
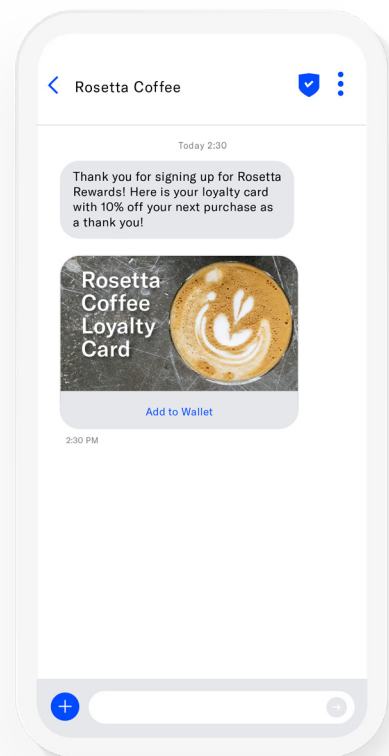


Create a Guided Experience With Smarter Transactional Messaging:

Send order confirmations and shipping tracking with images of the products they ordered, one-tap access to real-time tracking information — or a map with directions for a pickup location — and more. Airlines could use RCS messaging to guide the day of travel experience, from check-in to room key or boarding pass delivery. RCS also offers a seamless customer service experience with guided customer actions based on their specific service issues.

Boost Cross-Channel Acquisitions:

Encourage customers via RCS to opt-in to multiple channels to expand the number of opportunities you have to engage with them directly. From seamless loyalty program signup to app and mobile wallet pass downloads (for coupons, tickets, loyalty cards and more), RCS offers compelling opportunities to acquire customers on multiple channels.



Authentication:

Reduce friction with one-tap 2FA for logins and purchase approvals — without the need for customers to go through the hassle of entering unique codes to complete the approval process.





THE ROI OF RCS

Brands are seeing significant ROI from using RCS. Here are a few examples:

- **Deeper Engagement:** With its interactive features, RCS allows for deeper engagement with the brand and more communication opportunities compared to traditional SMS. With this greater customer engagement, the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts were able to boost guest satisfaction scores by over [20%](#) after trialing RCS.
- **Increased Data and Optimization Opportunities:** Brands can create unique customer journeys through RCS and measure how each step performs, including clicks, downloads, replies and direct purchases made. This allows brands to better understand their customer's behaviors and preferences and optimize the customer journey accordingly.
- **Increased Conversions:** With suggested replies and actions, brands are able to guide the customer journey and optimize for conversion, and then create a frictionless purchase with one tap to buy buttons. In fact, Subway saw a [140% increase](#) in conversions over SMS with their sandwich ordering RCS journey.

WHEN WILL RCS BE AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE?

It's easy to get into the weeds when talking about the availability of RCS. From differences in adoption rates between carriers and geographies to which carriers have adopted the agreed-upon standards (these standards are known as the Universal Profile) and more — there's a lot you could be keeping track of.

If you want to take a deep dive on the latest, check out the GSMA site — or be sure you're connected with Airship on social and signed up to receive our blog newsletter, as we'll be sharing RCS milestones as they happen.

But the simple answer to the question is that access to RCS is growing and is expected to be more widely available soon. Some of the major US carriers have implemented a form of RCS but typically without the Universal Profile, meaning it will only work on certain devices or within the same network. It is expected for major US carriers to start adopting the Universal Profile and growing RCS by 2020. Outside the US, some countries are further along than others, but RCS is not available everywhere yet.

However, even with its limited availability, RCS audience reach has already grown substantially. There are over [300 million monthly active RCS users as of May 2019](#) and GSMA expects there will be [900 million RCS users by 2020](#).

Google also recently announced that they will be rolling out the ability for users to opt in to RCS Chat services provided directly by Google instead of waiting for their carrier to support it. This may have the effect of further accelerating RCS availability — and substantially growing RCS usage on Android.

GETTING READY FOR RCS

Although audience reach is somewhat limited, there are several steps that brands can start taking now to get ready for the upcoming expansion of RCS.

Start strategizing communication flows: What will be your end goal for customer communications via RCS? What steps will best guide customers to that goal? And what are all the use cases that a customer may expect from your brand on RCS? Thinking through these questions and building out your RCS customer



journey will make you that much more prepared to start leveraging it quickly.

Connect your CRM and backend systems now: You will want to be able to stream data back to your data lake and start tracking behavioral data as soon as you start sending RCS, so connecting your CRM and other systems to the Airship platform via our Open API will make it that much faster to start sending, tracking and optimizing your RCS communication flows.

Set up a SMS/RCS strategy session with Airship: Airship is currently building out RCS, with a front end solution expected to be ready after the U.S. carriers go out of beta. In fact, Airship has been running a pilot program with Vodafone, which uses SMS as a fallback channel for RCS, and is seeing click-through rates above 40%.

CONCLUSION

RCS offers incredible opportunities for next-level customer engagement. To get that early adopter advantage — and be ready to launch customer experiences customers will love — brands should be using SMS today to test and learn what will work best in RCS. (If you're not already using SMS, we can get you up and running.)

Brands should also be looking to start conversations about which customer experiences make sense to pilot on RCS to they can hit the ground running. (We can help with that too, with strategy sessions to identify your best-bet opportunities.)

Start getting ready for RCS today with Airship!
Contact us to learn more about the future of
SMS and mobile communication.

CONTACT US TODAY!

