

SMS in HIGHER EDUCATION



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SMS improves communication for Higher Education establishments

With its familiarity and practicalities, SMS text messaging is still a major player in the further and higher education sector and an ideal way for students and teachers to interact. It's also a highly practical method of communication for academic establishments, which often have tight administrative budgets.

Members of pre-defined groups, such as classes, can be sent the same message with just one click, making the distribution of important information to the relevant individuals rapid and cost effective. Also, the nature of higher education establishments means that students are often off site, making it difficult to communicate last minute information to them. With SMS, students can be reached in any location almost instantaneously, which has proven to reduce absences and increase student retention.

The integration of SMS has enabled the University of West London to improve the communication between its staff members and its students, providing a new and more reliable outlet. Installing SMS Server enabled the University to not only integrate SMS with its SMTP mail server, but to provide access to its student database and provide a two-way messaging facility.

"SMS allows us to communicate with students in real time which gives us the flexibility to send information direct to the student's hand, whether it is regarding grades, timetable changes or student union marketing. This really fills in the gaps where other means of communication fail," explained Frank Barry, Head of Telecommunications, University of West London. "We developed an SMS building block for our Virtual Learning Environment. This allows tutors to access student's mobile phones via a common course or class database. Once in full operation this will increase the texting volume considerably. We will do this from an Outlook plug in for staff access to the service and also intend to introduce two-way messaging."



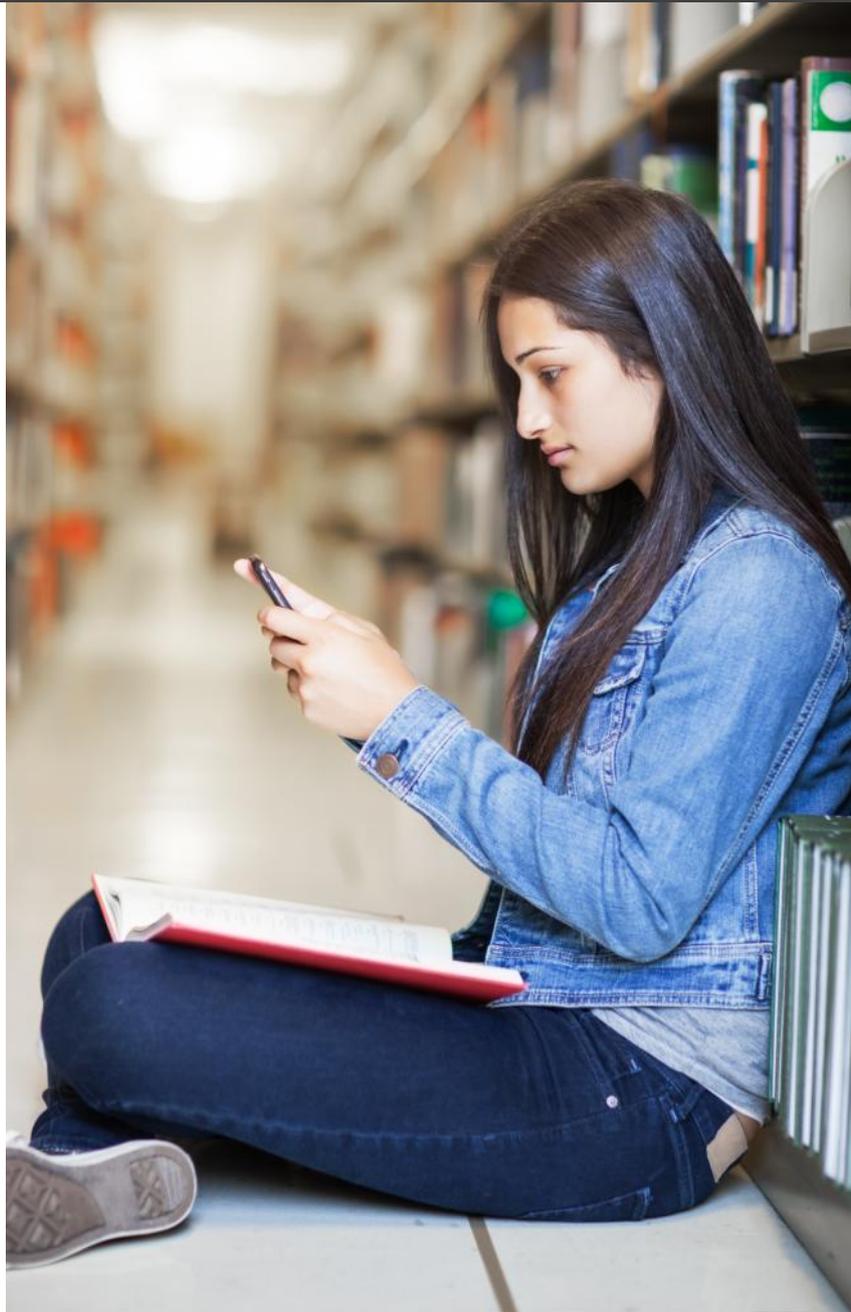
College benefits

Through being able to contact a large group of students in just one click, Berkshire College of Agriculture has also saved valuable time and money, allowing staff to dedicate time to other areas, leading to improved efficiency. The chance for students to give instant feedback means that issues can be resolved more swiftly and smoothly. If a student needs to contact a member of staff who is unavailable, they can directly contact the relevant person, without relying on others to deliver messages.

Sarah Irving, Head of Marketing and Customer Services, BCA, identified several uses and benefits of SMS in the college: "Every summer we send a greeting card to all students joining us in September, wishing them a good summer. This year we included our SMS number, encouraging students to register with us. We have also used the service for appointment reminders, which has led to an increase in attendance. During our enrolment weeks we promote the SMS number to students to encourage them to register with us, so we can keep them informed of things such as room and timetable changes; and also the important things like College parties."

With the ability to create a tailor-made system to fit the college's requirements, Writtle College has enjoyed several benefits from SMS Server. The first of these comes from the vastly improved accessibility to, and accuracy of, student absence notification. This has decreased administrative fees by reducing the number of calls being made and man hours spent on monitoring pupils' attendance.

The college has an in-house tool which determines which messages need to be sent from the database. The tool then composes the message and sends it to Exchange, which then sends the text. SMS Server is able to integrate into Exchange, meaning that sending and receiving messages couldn't be easier from the existing system.



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Improving student-teacher relationships

A lot of educational and professional bodies are now using SMS to send students exam results. ICAS, a leading professional body for Chartered Accountants (CAs), is one such organisation that wanted to provide a quicker and easier way for its students to receive their results. It also needed an additional communication channel to enhance member awareness of events and courses.

“A student sends their registration number via SMS to our automated SMS account. This then enrolls them to receive their result then sends them a confirmation SMS. On a result day, students that enrolled via the SMS service are issued with their result at 8am. Additionally, members that book on an event or course receive an SMS message the day before their scheduled event with a reminder of the location and time,” explained Andrew Baillie, Head of Information Technology, ICAS. “This SMS system has helped improve our services to our members and students by allowing ICAS to send targeted information to their mobile device. As everyone mostly has a mobile device, the SMS service makes it extremely convenient for the students. The ability to utilise a convenient mobile communications tool that can send information to our members and students in the knowledge that the message is getting straight to them in the palm of their hand is extremely beneficial.”

It is safe to say that nearly all students have mobile phones these days, and therefore SMS text messaging is the perfect form of communication to contact them directly, and immediately. Costs can be reduced and efficiency improved by one simple click. Other advantages that have been noticed by educational organisations come from less tangible benefits. Some institutions have used SMS to improve student-teacher relationships in what is often an impersonal environment, by sending congratulatory or commiserative text messages to students regarding work. Using SMS also adds variety and interest to learning, meaning that students are more likely to respond to and retain information.