

Introduction

Compliance with local regulations and laws is an essential requirement to ensure the delivery of messages and to avoid any penalties that may be imposed for violating these laws. In this guide, we have summarized the most important regulations and policies related to sending messages in Saudi Arabia, where compliance with these regulations is mandatory for the service of sending messages from the internet to mobile phones.

Regulatory Authorities for Internet-to-Mobile Messaging Services

The Communications, Space, and Technology Commission (CST) is the regulatory authority for the telecommunications and information technology sector in the Kingdom, responsible for organizing the service of sending SMS from the internet to mobile phones. The Commission sets the regulations that ensure the organization of the SMS market from the internet to mobile, contributing to the protection of the rights of end-users. These regulations apply to:

1. Telecommunication Network Operators:

These are mobile service providers such as STC, Mobily, and Zain, or other companies licensed by the Communications, Space, and Technology Commission to provide mobile communication services.

2. Service Providers:

Companies authorized by the CST to provide SMS services from the internet to mobile phones.

3. Senders:

Official entities that can benefit from SMS services from the internet to mobile phones, including promotional, service-related, awareness, and warning purposes. Senders must contract directly with an authorized service provider to send messages through them. Additionally, senders must comply with the prevailing laws in Saudi Arabia, refrain from sending any message containing content that violates these laws, and ensure that the message is sent under the correct sender name classification.

Classification of SMS Sent from Internet to Mobile

The CST has divided the content of SMS messages sent from the internet to mobile into five classifications, for reasons related to organizing the SMS market and ensuring user protection. The CST has established specific regulations for each classification to protect users from unsolicited or inappropriate messages. This classification helps strike a balance between meeting the needs of senders and protecting user rights.

1. Promotional Messages:

These are commercial or marketing messages for products or services or for fundraising purposes. Senders must comply with the CST's guidelines when sending promotional messages:

- Fully adhere to sending promotional content under the promotional sender name classified with the "-

AD" suffix.

- Refrain from sending promotional messages from external systems and send them only through the service provider's systems.
- Provide the end-user with the explicit option to opt-in or out of receiving promotional messages. Implicit consent through privacy policies or service agreements is not considered valid.
- Enable the end-user to request the cessation of promotional messages at any time through traditional and electronic channels.
- Stop sending any further messages within 24 hours of receiving the stop request.
- Send a confirmation notice upon activation or deactivation of promotional messages.
- Refrain from sending promotional messages between 10:00 PM and 9:00 AM daily, and from 1:00 AM to 12:00 PM during Ramadan.
- Promotional messages cannot be sent from a mobile number.
- Government entities and foreign entities are not allowed to send promotional messages.

2. Service Messages:

These are messages with service content, sent to a specific user to provide them with a contracted service, notify them of service-related transactions, or offer features and options. Senders must comply with the CST's guidelines for service messages:

- Adhere to sending service content under a service-classified sender name.
- Clearly state the reason for sending a two-factor authentication (OTP) code in the message, rather than just sending the code alone.

3. Awareness Messages:

These are awareness or instructional messages sent by entities such as government agencies, banks, hospitals, etc., to the general public or specific user groups. Senders must comply with CST guidelines for awareness messages:

- Adhere to sending awareness content under an awareness-classified sender name.
- Refrain from sending awareness messages between 10:00 PM and 9:00 AM daily, and from 1:00 AM to 12:00 PM during Ramadan.
- Coordinate with the relevant regulatory body before sending the message to the end-user.
- The official sender name must be included at the end of the message.
- A maximum of one message per day is allowed unless otherwise specified by the Commission.

4. Warning Messages:

High-priority warning messages sent by government entities to the public in all or some regions of the Kingdom, aimed at warning about an imminent or ongoing event. Senders must comply with the CST guidelines for warning messages:

- Fully adhere to sending warning content under a warning-classified sender name.
- Warning messages can only be sent by government entities.

5. Personal Messages:

These are SMS messages directed from one specific user number to another for personal purposes. This type of message is not currently allowed through service providers as no guidelines have been established by the CST for personal messages.

Registration of Sender Names:

The CST has regulated the registration of sender names to reduce spam, fraudulent, and impersonation messages and to protect user rights. Telecom network operators are required to adopt a unified system for registering and approving sender names, which ensures the verification of entities using these names. Access to this system is only allowed through authorized message service providers certified by the CST. Senders must register their names according to the correct classification of the message content and provide all the necessary requirements to the message service provider to begin processing the request.

SMS Service for Government, Semi-Government Entities, and Banks:

The CST has established regulations for providing SMS services to government entities, semi-government entities, and banks. Compliance with these regulations is mandatory as they aim to enhance trust in the services provided and ensure a secure communication environment between institutions and the public. The regulations are as follows:

- Before sending any SMS, the content must be prepared electronically by a specialized employee within the entity and then electronically approved by an authorized official.
- Users are not permitted to modify the message text after it has been approved, except in cases of amendment, which will require new approval.
- Automatically sent service messages, such as two-factor authentication messages, must be approved once only.
- The content of the message must be prepared and approved by different users.
- The user of the SMS system must be a Saudi national.

Data Protection:

Data protection includes a set of measures and technologies aimed at protecting information from unauthorized access, breaches, and loss. These measures include encryption, developing strong security policies, and training employees to handle data safely. The CST has emphasized data protection by setting regulations that require telecom operators and message service providers to protect both sender and user data. Dealing directly with an authorized message service provider ensures the protection of sensitive information from breaches and loss.

Policy for Sending Messages via WhatsApp API:

Meta has established guidelines and rules that regulate how businesses can use WhatsApp services to send messages, ensuring a safe and effective communication experience for users. Companies must comply with these policies to ensure the quality of their accounts and avoid partial or complete bans.

Registration in WhatsApp API Messaging Service:

Meta launched this service to help businesses communicate effectively with their customers, allowing them to send unlimited messages and automate responses to customer inquiries seamlessly. Meta has set the following requirements for registering in this service:

1. Choosing a Business Solution Provider:

Meta provides this service through a certified partner, who facilitates access to WhatsApp API services by providing the necessary tools and support to integrate the API with existing business systems. These certified partners offer services such as account setup, message management, CRM integration, and ongoing technical support.

2. Creating an Account with the Service Provider:

After selecting a business solution provider, you will need to register with them. At this stage, you may be required to provide basic business information such as the trade name, business type, and website. Legal documents may also be needed to prove ownership of the business to verify your account.

3. Linking a Business Phone Number:

The phone number to be linked to the WhatsApp API can be either a mobile or landline number. Please note that some numbers, such as toll-free numbers, may be rejected for linking to the service. The service provider will handle the process of linking the business number, which requires you to provide a verification code sent via SMS or phone call.

4. Setting Up a Business Profile:

Setting up a business profile on WhatsApp API enhances the identity of your company by providing clear information such as the business name, description, and working hours, improving the customer experience and increasing the company's credibility. The profile helps organize communication, provide basic information, and enhance the effectiveness of promotional messages, along with integrating it into other marketing strategies.

5. Integration with Systems:

Once the account is set up, you can begin integrating WhatsApp API with CRM systems or other tools used in your business. Ensure that the integration enhances operational efficiency by simplifying customer interaction management, providing a smooth experience through effective linking between WhatsApp and existing systems, automating responses, and analyzing data to improve strategies and customer service.

Maintaining High-Quality Conversations:

Success in using the WhatsApp API and achieving maximum benefit depends greatly on the quality of conversations. This requires maintaining a high level of professionalism and clarity in messages, contributing to customer satisfaction. To achieve this, companies must adhere to WhatsApp's policies approved by Meta, in addition to using a unique and distinguished communication style. Failure to maintain high conversation quality may result in account suspension due to negative customer reviews and complaints. Some steps to help maintain high-quality conversations include:

- Monitor sent messages and ensure they comply with WhatsApp policies to avoid violations that could lead to account suspension.
- Personalize messages for each customer based on their data and preferences, avoiding generic messages for all customers.
- Respond to customer inquiries as quickly as possible to meet their needs and resolve their issues effectively.
- Use automation tools for frequently asked questions, but always provide an option for human interaction when necessary.
- Use analytics tools to track message performance and customer interaction. Collect data on open rates, engagement, and response times.
- Obtain explicit consent from customers before sending any marketing messages.
- Send marketing messages at reasonable and non-disruptive times.
- Always provide a clear option for customers to opt-out of marketing messages.

Messaging Restrictions:

The WhatsApp API imposes several restrictions to ensure a high-quality experience and protect users from unsolicited messages. These restrictions include rules and guidelines that must be followed to avoid violating policies.

1. Message Type Restrictions:

WhatsApp API imposes a set of restrictions on the types of messages that can be sent through the system to protect users from unsolicited messages and ensure a positive user experience. The following are the types of messages that can be sent:

- **Marketing:** Includes special offers, product alerts, or other promotional content. Marketing messages must be relevant to the customer and based on their previous preferences.
- **Utility:** Used to follow up on user requests or actions, such as subscription confirmation, order management or delivery updates, and account updates.
- **Service:** These messages respond to conversations initiated by the user. Companies are allowed to send any type of message within a 24-hour service window.
- **Authentication:** Used to verify user identities with one-time passwords, such as in account verification or recovery processes.

Adhering to these classifications ensures compliance with WhatsApp's policies and reduces the risk of penalties, such as account suspension or customer complaints. Meta reviews all message templates before allowing their use to ensure they comply with privacy and messaging policies.

2. Response Time Restrictions:

In the WhatsApp system, a conversation is considered active when there is a recent interaction between the user and the company. The purpose of this rule is to ensure that the messages sent to users are part of an ongoing interaction, reducing the likelihood of them receiving unsolicited messages.

If there is no interaction from the user within 24 hours of sending their message, the conversation is considered inactive. This means that companies must send a new message from an approved template if they wish to send messages after this period.

3. Message Volume Restrictions:

When subscribing to the WhatsApp Business service, there are restrictions on the number of messages that can be sent, which vary based on the account classification and its interactions. Below is a detailed breakdown of these restrictions:

- **New accounts** can send a maximum of 250 messages daily in the first week.
- **Level 1:** The account can send up to 1,000 messages per day.
- **Level 2:** The account can send up to 10,000 messages per day.
- **Level 3:** The account can send up to 100,000 messages per day.
- **Level 4:** The account can send an unlimited number of messages.

You can upgrade your account by improving the account quality rating and complying with WhatsApp's policies. Ensure that you regularly send high-quality messages and maintain positive user interactions. When these conditions are met, your account may be upgraded to a higher level automatically, based on continuous performance evaluation and policy compliance.

4. Message Size Restrictions:

WhatsApp API imposes several restrictions on the size of messages that can be sent to users to ensure a high-quality user experience and protect against unsolicited messages. These restrictions include the following:

1. Text:

- The maximum number of characters allowed in the **Header** is 60 characters.
- The maximum number of characters allowed in the **Body** is 1,024 characters.
- The maximum number of characters allowed in the **Footer** is 60 characters.
- The maximum number of characters allowed in a **Button** is 20 characters, and a maximum of 3 buttons can be added.

2. Images:

- Accepted image formats include **JPG, JPEG, PNG**.
- The maximum file size for images is **5 MB**.

3. Videos:

- Supported video formats include **MP4, 3GPP**.
- The maximum file size for videos is **16 MB**.

4. Stickers:

- Sticker files must be **WebP** format.
- The dimensions should be **512x512 pixels**.
- The maximum sticker file size is **100 KB**.
- The sticker must have a 16-pixel margin.
- Stickers must have a transparent background.
- Animated stickers are not accepted.

5. Documents:

- Supported document formats include **PDF, DOC, PPT, XLS**.
- The maximum document size is **100 MB**.

Failure to comply with the specified size restrictions for messages, regardless of the message content, can result in the message not reaching the intended recipients. In the WhatsApp API service, precise limits on message sizes have been set to ensure optimal performance and service quality. If messages exceed these limits, whether they are text or attachments, they may not be delivered to users or may encounter delivery issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the importance of complying with local laws and regulations to ensure that you achieve your goals in sending messages effectively and safely. At **Taqnyat al Jawal**, we provide full support to implement these regulations efficiently and offer the technical solutions you need to achieve a successful marketing strategy.

By using our platform, you can focus on building your marketing strategies and expanding your reach without worrying about technical details or associated challenges. We are here to provide the necessary tools and expert guidance to ensure high-quality interaction with your customers while maintaining compliance with local regulations.

Join **Taqnyat al Jawal** today, and start your journey towards enhancing communication with your customers in innovative and effective ways. Let us help you achieve success and continue growing in an ever-changing business environment while we take care of all the technical details on your behalf.