



Phone: +27 (0)21 528 3420

Fax: +27 (0)21 552 2848

Website: www.bulksms.com

4th Floor South Lobby
Boulevard Place Heron Crescent
Century City 7441 South Africa

PRESS RELEASE
BULKSMS.COM
July 2010

Mobile phone designers challenged to keep up with users

Mobile phone handset designers should look to social networking for inspiration to improve the management of communications on phones, says BulkSMS.com's managing director, Pieter Streicher. He maintains that it is ridiculous that many aspects of the mobile phone user interface haven't changed in ten years, especially when it comes to contact management and SMS functionality.

A 2009 study by Naomi S. Baron into mobile phone behaviour highlighted the "reachability conundrum" in consumers' attitudes to always being in touch. One of the aspects of the mobile phone that users liked the most – reachability – was also one of the things they liked the least. People were finding it more and more difficult to separate work life from home, family and leisure time.

To help solve this, designers and manufacturers can learn a thing or two from the way social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook allow users to manage their contacts, build lists and 'unfriend' or 'unfollow' people.

As with Facebook, users should be able to divide contacts into different groups, each with their own settings and preferences, says Streicher. He would like to see people having the ability to quickly and easily block callers on a once-off basis, or permanently. Or be able to discreetly fire off an SMS template to the caller, if for instance, they are in a meeting and unable to take the call.

The creation of groups of contacts, for example, work, family, friends, acquaintances, etc would allow people to separate work and leisure time. They would have the ability to respond to calls differently at different times, so a work call received after hours could be replied to via SMS asking the caller to communicate via SMS. Similarly, social calls could be responded to by SMS during work hours, again requesting the caller rather send an SMS.

Some of this functionality is starting to appear on phones as third party applications, such as Nokia E72 ACM, but none are fully integrated into the contact manager yet.

In addition, the average person sends and receives more SMSs than voice calls. Even users who upgrade to smartphones find that, even though they have heaps of new functionality on their device, they in fact start sending more SMSs because it's easier to do thanks to QWERTY keyboards and touch screens. Tomi Ahonen estimates there were between 3.6 and 4 billion users of SMS at the end of 2009. But on the whole, handset design is lagging consumer behaviour and doesn't take the popularity of SMS into account.

Other improvements that can be made:

1. Many phones, such as Android handsets, only give you the option to delete SMSs one-by-one, or to delete all of them. With message volumes increasing, an option to delete a list of selected messages would be very useful.

2. Likewise, with increasing SMS volumes, handsets need to give users a way to search their messages. With more businesses using SMS to send customers important information such as reference numbers or account numbers, customers want to be able to quickly and easily find information in messages they have saved.
3. Delivery reports are currently handled very poorly by most handsets. The reports are stored separately to the messages, and usually only a limited number of reports are kept. These should be integrated with the sent message, allowing the user to quickly and easily see whether a message has been delivered, is pending, or has failed.
4. While some smartphones do allow you to list SMSs as a threaded conversation, similar to the way instant messaging (IM) software behaves, this capability should be introduced as a matter of course to better reflect how people use messaging.

It doesn't make sense that handset manufacturers haven't kept pace with the way consumers behave, says Streicher. Initially this could be explained by SMS not being intended to be a commercial service – it was something that evolved more or less by accident. But subsequently its popularity amongst users, and its growing adoption as a critical business tool, means that SMS and messaging behaviour should really be a critical factor directing handset designers.