



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

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Professional development made easy with SMS

By: Dr Pieter Streicher, MD at BulkSMS.com

It's nice to think that the professionals we turn to, such as doctors and other medical practitioners, lawyers, veterinarians and so on, are on top of their game and up to speed with the latest advances in their fields. Fortunately, thanks to a system called continuing professional development (CPD), you can be sure they are.

Although we have an extensive range of CPD programmes running in South Africa, it was proving increasingly difficult to administer the various schemes: process the test results, record event attendance, capture the points the professionals earned and keep their records up to date.

In many cases, the professional may only remain registered with their professional body if they earn a certain number of points in a year. But if these points aren't captured or the professional's records aren't updated in time, the system falls apart. This is where CPD Solutions (www.cpdolutions.co.za) saw a great opportunity for the Web and SMS to make the CPD system work.

The company built an online dashboard that each CPD scheme can be customised and used to manage their programmes and membership. Realising it would limit the usefulness of the service to have it only accessible via the web, CPD Solutions signed up BulkSMS.com to add an SMS component to the service. Adding an SMS channel allowed busy professionals to log attendance at off-site events, complete the quizzes after hours and check their CPD points anytime, wherever they are.

In addition the SMS service allows the professionals to:

- Sign up for the service even if they don't have Internet access
- Log more than one CPD qualifying activity per SMS
- Receive immediate feedback on their submission: whether the points have been logged successfully; if they were previously logged via another channel; if the time limit for registering an activity has expired; or if the unique code used is invalid.
- Change their pin code or request a reminder
- Change their registered cell phone number

So, for instance, a professional body can publish a CPD article in its newsletter with a multiple-choice test. The professional can then send an SMS with the test's identifier and their sequence of answers to the standard-rated short code. For example: test1 abcde abcde. The system then decodes the SMS, scores the test and issues the CPD points to the individual.

Riaan Bezuidenhout, the programmer at CPD Solutions who developed the system, said he selected BulkSMS.com as their SMS partner because it offered the functionality he needed to make CPS Solutions work. Each incoming SMS is unique and is processed and replied to individually. In addition, the message traffic flow is pretty lumpy and can spike hugely during an event attended by many professionals. Bezuidenhout uses the HTTP API to receive the information that is then passed on to his system and processed. He then sends the replies via the SMTP API.



In addition, CPD Solutions charges its customers a flat fee for the web service, plus a charge for each user that registers. BulkSMS.com's reasonable costs and per message billing make this model workable for Bezuidenhout.

"But, most important is that the system just works seamlessly," said Bezuidenhout. Once it was set up I haven't needed to touch it, it just runs smoothly in the background. In addition, a large number of the professionals prefer the SMS interface to the Web-based one because it is so simple and quick to use."

"This is a great example of how you can extend the capabilities and convenience of the Web via a simple SMS feature," said Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com. "Whether thanks to circumstance or preference, so many South Africans opt for the SMS channel above any other."

Bezuidenhout hopes to see the service gain popularity amongst the nursing profession – giving nurses the convenience of logging CPD points even if they are rarely in the office. He also has plans for a school service that logs and reports teacher attendance via SMS first thing every morning.