



R I S I N G A C A D E M Y
N E T W O R K

Technical and General Tips - SMS

Introduction

With the closure of schools due to the COVID19 pandemic, Rising has adapted our foundational learning content to create a series of 20-week radio programs that will strengthen and build students' reading and math skills, even when they are out of school.

To enhance the effectiveness of our radio programming, we have developed a complementary 20-week series of SMS content. We focus on parents as the recipient of our messages and the role they play in supporting children as regular, engaged radio listeners and learners. Particularly in low-income countries and/or low-bandwidth settings, SMS is an appropriate strategy to communicate with a large number of families at a low-cost.

Below we provide some lessons learned and helpful tips for others considering SMS as a complementary strategy to radio as a distance learning approach.

1. Collection of phone numbers:

- Ask school principals and teachers to create a list of student names.
- Add contact numbers (two contacts if possible), school and grade level to the list.
- It saves time if principals/teachers can provide this information electronically in a standard format. Otherwise, hard copies need to be converted to electronic format.

2. Subscription to an SMS platform:

- This is a software platform that allows us to schedule and send SMS in bulk.
- There are many options in the market (e.g. SMSGlobal, Telerivet, CommCare, Twilio, InfoBip).
- In many countries, mobile network operators also offer these services. However, the implementation of the intervention will depend on the time, experience and work schedule of the mobile operator.
- Depending on the volume and frequency of the SMS, paid services may apply.
- Other services might be of interest to you, like IVR (Interactive Voice Response), polls, auto-replies, subscriptions, etc.
- It is possible to get in touch with mobile network operators or reach out to different SMS platform services online to obtain toll-free numbers and allow your families to reach you for free
- Virtual numbers can be bought from service providers, as well as short-codes that permit displaying organization names as senders.

3. Develop content that works for your audience:

- Test the SMS platform and your content before starting your intervention. This will help you familiarize with the functionalities of the platform, challenges during implementation and it can also give you an estimation of the cost (in time and money) of the intervention.
- Try out different contents and collect feedback from parents about which one work best for them
- Try out sending SMS at different times of the day to learn when is best to reach them
- Try out SMS of different length. Check [this website](#) to see your planned text message on a handset screen
- Be aware some parents only switch on their phones during the weekends

4. Set up your messages:

- Messages are customizable based on other information like names, schools, grades, etc.
- You can set up many SMS to be sent at the same time to different groups
- Schedule your messages in advance
- Two-way SMS are a good way to receive feedback from parents, but will cost them money unless a toll-free number is set up. Note not all SMS platforms allow for two-way messaging

5. Learn about your impact:

- SMS platforms collect data for you (e.g. # messages sent and received, # calls, time and date, etc).
- If two-way communication is enabled, you can download all this data for analysis
- Unfortunately, most of the platforms don't offer delivery notice services in low income countries

Other general tips:

- Estimate the cost of your SMS campaign and track it daily at the beginning
- Someone has to be on duty at the time SMS are being sent to course correct and troubleshoot errors
- Plan whether you want to respond to SMS and calls back and how. Expect many calls coming in the first days.