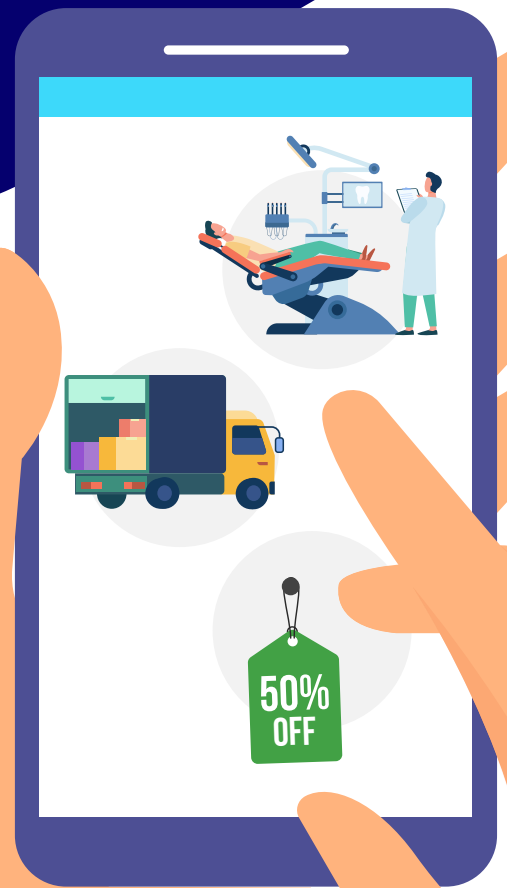


10 Ways a CPaaS Can Improve Your Business Communications

Plivo's Guide to Better Customer Experience

Inside you'll learn:

- How to use communications to create better experiences and drive loyalty
- Why you need to adapt your business communications for today's changed behaviors, higher customer expectations, and shorter attention spans
- How a CPaaS can streamline business communications to meet the challenges of today's mobile-first world



Introduction

To say that recent events have changed how we interact personally and professionally seems like an understatement in light of how social distancing, travel restrictions, occupancy limits, remote work, and virtual events have affected us all.

So many industries have been forced to adapt in different ways:

- **Retail:** stores closed to in-person shopping, new curbside pickup and delivery options, supply chain issues, shipping and logistic challenges
- **Hospitality:** bans on indoor dining, menu updates to accommodate delivery and takeout, event cancellations, restaurant and venue closures, and reservation updates to adhere to capacity limits (confirmations via SMS)
- **Medical:** telehealth becoming the norm, appointment scheduling and screenings, limited waiting room capacity, staffing shortages, and real-time communication channels between hospital employees (administrative staff, nurses, doctors)
- **Banking:** disruption of in-person banking, website and in-app chat for faster customer resolution using conversational AI, more advanced IVR menus to intelligently route calls and reduce handling time or give callers the option of receiving either a callback, switch to chat, or text, rather than waiting line
- **Education:** move to virtual learning, teachers using virtual numbers as a proxy for their real phone numbers, sending SMS messages to notify parents and students of changes in the calendar year
- **Travel:** schedule cuts, passenger limits, and preflight health screenings

And that's just a list of changes to the scope of services — it doesn't begin to address how to communicate these changes to customers. Add wildfires, winter storms, hurricanes, and a few other natural disasters to the pandemic-related changes and it's been a wild ride for everyone in business.

Through it all, those who managed to communicate well have been the standouts. Between slow vaccine rollouts, hybrid working models, and our increased dependency on getting things delivered to us at home, the likelihood of everything going back to normal anytime soon is low. So now's the time to think through your communication strategy and make sure you're prepared to accommodate evolving customer expectations and potential behavior changes.



10 ways your business communications can create better experiences and drive loyalty

At Plivo, our mission is to simplify business communications. We've spent a lot of time focusing on how to help you better communicate with your customers, and we've come up with this list of 10 ways to adapt your communications to meet new and constantly changing customer expectations, so you can provide better experiences for your customers and enhance customer loyalty.

1. Keep in touch

Proactive customer communication in the face of recent upheaval is critical to keeping your customers engaged, satisfied, and loyal. SMS notifications are a great way to keep in touch.

How useful is SMS? Consider these statistics from TechJury:

- 5 billion people in the world can send and receive SMS messages.
- 75% of consumers are OK with receiving SMS messages from brands after they've opted in.
- SMS messages have a whopping 98% open rate.
- Text messages have a 209% higher response rate than phone, email, or Facebook.
- 90% of SMS messages are read within three minutes.

If you're not already set up for SMS, consider this: Almost two-thirds of customers would switch to a company that offered text messaging as a communication channel.

Texting enables you to connect with customers in a manner that is fast, personalized, and actionable, allowing you to:

- Build personal connections
- Automate your customer service process
- Instantly answer support issues
- Collect customer feedback
- Save your employees and your customers time



There are use cases for almost every industry:

- Financial transaction statuses
- Estimated time of arrival alerts
- Order status updates
- Lead alerts to sales teams
- Password reset codes
- Delivery and shipping notifications
- Appointment reminders
- Server alerts
- Customer support responses
- Satisfaction surveys



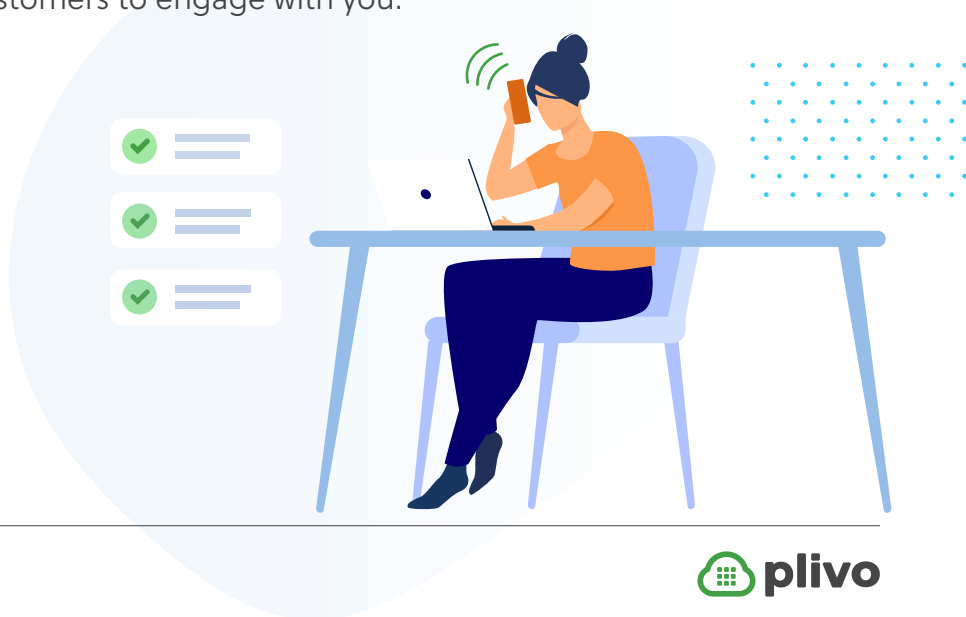
Plivo customer Luxer One made a shift from using email to using SMS for package delivery notifications. It first worked with a large SMS API provider whose platform had periodic hiccups during which some of Luxer One's messages didn't get through, and about once a month, the company would experience a complete channel failure caused by blocked phone numbers. The company turned to Plivo instead, and found that integrating Plivo with Luxer One's application took only a few hours of work. Plivo helped Luxer One build a high-throughput application-to-person SMS solution that complies with carrier rules and best practices.

— Luxer One

2. Omnichannel is best

We've made the case for text messaging with its unparalleled open rates and high response rates, but an omnichannel approach to customer communication can help ensure that you stay connected with your customers at all times. By omnichannel, we mean making sure your customers can communicate with you through both messaging and voice, both for proactive outreach on your end and for customers to engage with you.

Take home sharing app Houst. Looking to improve the guest experience, Houst adopted SMS notifications and created a new call center in which every property maintains its own virtual phone number for faster, personalized guest communications.



That number is provided to the guest as a contact number for Houst's support and property management teams. All automated text messages to the guest, such as payment verification, check-in and check-out details, and review requests, use the property's dedicated number.

If a guest decides to call or text, whether it's about a flight delay or a property issue, a Houst guest experience representative can immediately bring up all the details regarding the property and guest for more effective communication and better customer service.

"We have created a seamless experience for the guest, and it builds confidence that they will get the help they need," Houst Engineering Manager Piotr Matuszkiewicz says. "It has a measurable impact on the review after their stay, too. If they're provided with great support — even if the problem seems to be on our end or there was something wrong with the property — and are helped in an effective way, that has an impact on the review. It is more likely to be positive than negative."

3. Offer self-service

Another great way to meet customer expectations is to let them help themselves. For every case that a customer needs to contact you for assistance, there's probably another case that they can handle on their own if you give them the tools.

One such tool is interactive voice response (IVR), which can be set up as an auto-attendant that replaces an actual receptionist. IVR can route calls to agents during business hours or provide automated voice messages after business hours. What's more, an IVR system that's integrated with your CRM platform can be a good first step in providing a great customer experience, handling large call volumes, and reducing the costs associated with customer service.

This takes us back to self-service. With access to a good IVR setup, customers can conveniently open service tickets, pay bills, schedule payments, book appointments, and track order shipments. If you receive large volumes of IT requests, you can offer guided instructions for resetting passwords or rebooting customer applications. Whenever a customer has an inquiry that can't be resolved with one of these automated options, you can redirect them to a live agent for more personalized solutioning.

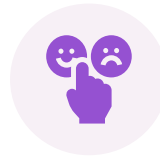


Here are some detailed use cases for both inbound and outbound communication via IVR:



Call center setup

You can implement a multilevel IVR system in call centers that routes incoming calls based on user input.



Televoting and surveys

You can use IVR with outbound calls to collect information from customers, such as satisfaction or Net Promoter Scores.



Appointment reminders

You can set up automated appointment notifications to remind customers about their scheduled appointments in advance and facilitate rescheduling as needed.



Lead assignment and lead routing

For inbound sales calls, you can set up IVR with a set of qualifying questions to understand customers' interest and redirect calls to representatives based on lead scores.

4. Be nimble

The pandemic taught businesses the importance of being nimble when it comes to business communications. Every time things seemed back to normal for the retail and travel industries, they would suddenly have to accommodate new or changed restrictions. Especially during the holiday seasons, communications couldn't fail and had to be easily adaptable.

Think about some of the things different kinds of businesses had to quickly communicate:

- **Retailers** had to send updated promotions, store capacity limits, or reduced hours.
- **Ecommerce vendors** had to send delivery notifications and updates for gifts.
- **Grocery stores and restaurants** had to arrange for curbside pickup or home delivery.
- **Airlines** had to passengers of flight changes or updated health and safety guidelines.
- **Rideshare platforms** had to notify passenger of pickup and mask requirements.

Here are a few tips for businesses that need to make a quick switch can use SMS to make sure their communications reached their intended audience:



Be recognizable

If you're sending messages outside the US and Canada, a sender ID can help identify your brand as the sender, thereby increasing engagement with recipients. In some countries, a sender ID can display a custom alphanumeric string such as the company's name or service instead of a long code or short code phone number. Some countries require registration before you can obtain a sender ID, so plan ahead.



Short isn't always sweet

Short codes offer a clean, fast, and legally compliant option for sending high-volume, one-way application-to-person (A2P) communications. But, compared to other SMS number types such as long codes and toll-free numbers, short codes are the most heavily regulated number type. Short codes take the longest to get approval for and have the most expensive rates. If you're trying to make a sudden switch, a short code may not be the best option.



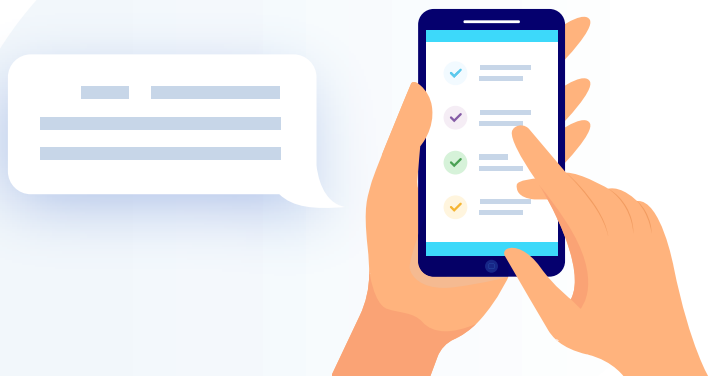
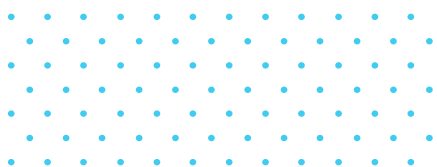
Turn up the volume

If you're changing tactics and suddenly incorporating more messages than you originally planned into your communications strategy, you'll need a solution that automates the sending of potentially hundreds of thousands of messages and is designed to meet these large-scale message throughput and volume requirements.



Don't forget the visuals

Multimedia messages can help you stand out. If your store is closed or the hours have changed, but you still need to promote a Black Friday or Cyber Monday sale, use MMS messaging to send a variety of formats: pictures (JPEG and GIF), emojis, audio (MP3), and video (MP4).





Plivo customer Deckers is a case study in being nimble. The footwear maker needed to send a high volume of messages daily, and each had to be specific to a customer, detailing the type of shipment and delivery status. Deckers uses Plivo to send application-to-person SMS using different numbers for each of Deckers' brands. After a customer places an order, Deckers sends shipment updates until the package is in hand.

Adopting Plivo was nearly seamless. With a simple API and great documentation, implementing Plivo only took a week, says Jacob Martinez, Project Manager for Deckers' ecommerce team. "The mindset change of moving to SMS from email may have taken longer than actually implementing Plivo's SMS."

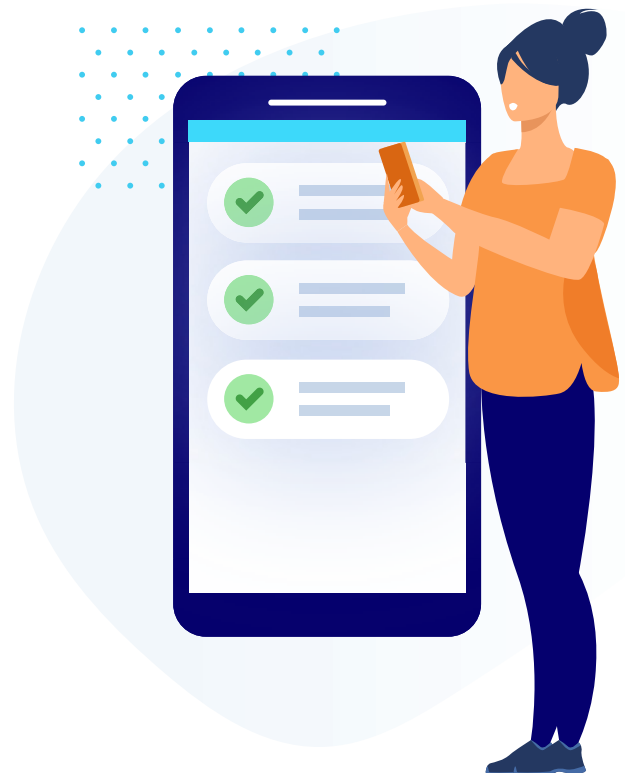
— Deckers

5. Get the number right

In this case, the right number doesn't mean dialing correctly, but rather making sure your communications platform can programmatically determine the validity of the number format, type, country, and carrier for any phone number.

Using a phone number validation API reduces errors and risk while increasing conversion rates and engagement. You can:

- Determine whether a customer's phone number is valid before including that number in your contact list.
- Segregate landlines from mobile numbers and only message numbers that can actually receive SMS.
- Compare the IP location and phone number's country, along with other customer details, to trigger additional steps and set up two-factor authentication as needed.



Let's look at a breakdown of the information that can be retrieved about a phone number:



Phone number country and format

Numbers can be written in many formats, depending on the country. And determining the country a number belongs to and its local format helps improve your overall experience with customers. By properly formatting phone numbers for a given region automatically, using length and prefix, you can systematically ensure that the numbers you select are the most familiar to locals.



Carrier and network

Identifying the carrier behind the phone number to learn which users are more likely to be legitimate is one of the most valuable use cases of a phone number validation tool as it relates to your fraud detection and risk management process. Is the number valid, is it reachable, and does the carrier location match other location information you have for the user? You can use all of these questions within your risk scoring process during registration.



Phone number type

You can improve deliverability by looking up number types and determining which numbers don't accept all communications. For example, most landline numbers and many VoIP numbers don't accept SMS messages. By identifying which kinds of communications users can accept, based on their number types, businesses can recognize when an alternative delivery method may be needed to send voice and messaging communications.



6. Follow best practices

SMS may help you cut through clutter and reach customers more effectively, but keep in mind that SMS delivery isn't failproof; it hinges on a number of factors, both in and out of your control.

Delayed, undelivered, or unreadable messages (due to unsupported characters) can increase your costs in two ways:

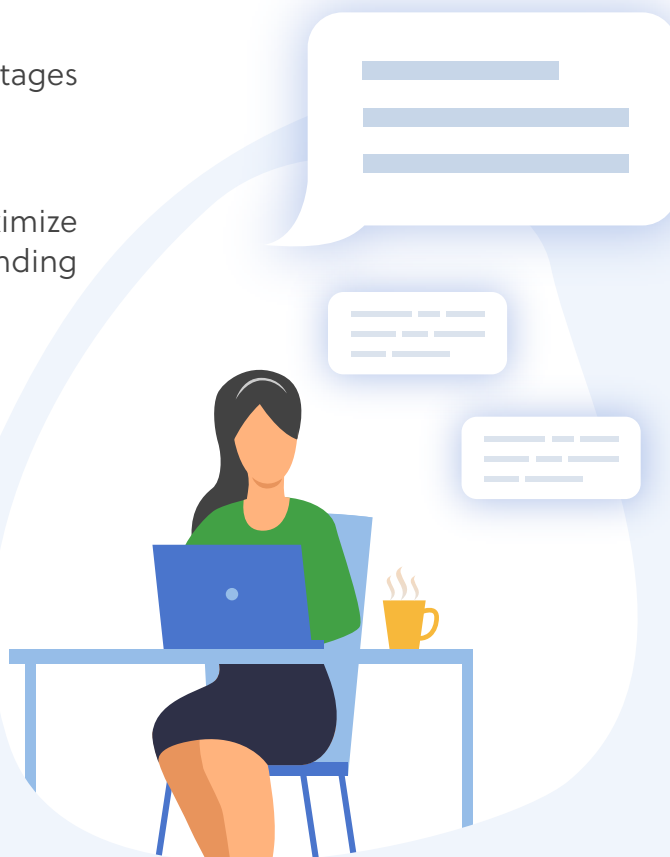
- API platforms charge for SMS messages based on the number of messages you attempt to send, which could be higher than the number of messages delivered.
- SMS issues could upend your customer support and security strategies, leading to customer churn.

Understanding why your SMS messages might not get delivered — and working with a communications API platform that can help you avoid, monitor, and repair issues quickly — can go a long way toward improving your SMS strategy.

Here are five common reasons your SMS messages might not reach your customers:

1. Carriers filter your messages as spam
2. Customer complaints lead to blocked numbers
3. Carrier regulations restrict messaging
4. A low-quality carrier network causes more outages
5. Your API provider lacks intelligent features

Don't fear — as a sender, you can do a lot to maximize your chances of success. In addition to understanding why your messages might be held up, it's critical to get familiar with SMS best practices. Armed with this information, you can focus on content that captures your recipients' attention — and worry less about the risk of delivery failure. We've got some resources to get you going. Start with our [SMS best practices](#) blog post and then [download our comprehensive best practices guide](#) to help you craft, format, and send great messages.



7. Be dynamic

For most API providers, a lot goes on behind the scenes to make sure your communications get where they need to go every time. But outages and delivery failures can still happen, so businesses can and should support multiple carriers for high availability.

Having multiple carriers offers another benefit — it gives a communications platform routing options. The platform can then offer dynamic routing capabilities to ensure that all messages are delivered over the best-performing carrier route to the destination mobile network. That's especially critical with two-factor authentication, because people expect to receive their authorization messages immediately, and any delay impedes their ability to accomplish their tasks. In an ideal world, the platform would be able to identify that, for example, carrier A has a conversion rate of 85% and carrier B 94%, and intelligently choose carrier B to ensure the lowest latency. How can a communications platform determine the most efficient carrier route?

One technique a communication platform can use is to deploy handsets as global test nodes across all the countries with multiple carriers, using real phone numbers from carriers local to each region. The platform can then send messages to the test nodes and receive back results that confirm voice and SMS deliverability, report speed of deliverability, give confirmation of sender ID, and indicate correct message concatenation, as well as character set.

The platform can also get feedback from delivered messages. With this approach, developers can mark one-time password (OTP) messages as trackable. Then, when a user successfully authenticates their account using a verification code from the platform, the result gets reported back. Especially in countries where carrier networks are generally unstable, this feedback can play an important role in choosing a carrier to ensure consistently high delivery rates for 2FA and OTP SMS messages.

The bottom line: When choosing a provider, make sure they have the capability to dynamically and automatically reroute traffic to better-performing carriers. Your communications success depends on it!



Plivo's dynamic approach works for customer Jungleworks. "We did our research and discovered that Plivo offers high reliability and coverage over both IP and carrier networks in the markets that were most applicable to us, and it required minimal development effort for our team," says Danish Midha, Lead Procurement Specialist at Jungleworks. "Deliverability increased by as much as 9% compared to our previous provider, so we knew right away that the quality of Plivo's network was top-notch. We also appreciated the fact that they could navigate the telecoms infrastructure on our behalf."

— Jungleworks

8. Have a reliable backup

By backup, we don't mean backing up your data. We're talking about fallback channels or platforms.

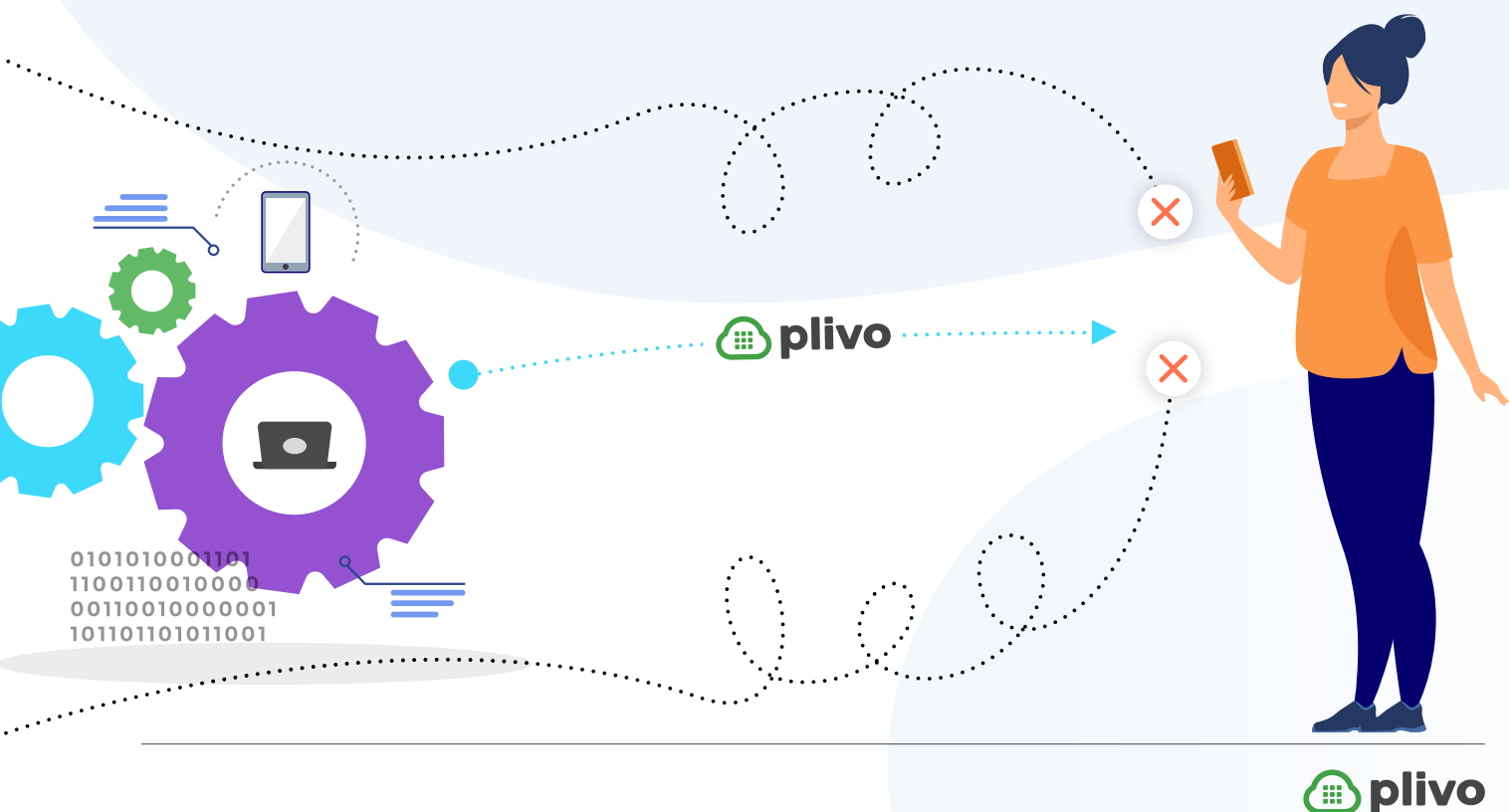
Take two-factor authentication, for example. It's critical that every 2FA voice and SMS OTP message gets delivered quickly. But it's more than just sending messages — a lot of steps go into ensuring 2FA messages arrive within the 10- to 15-second window that avoids disruption in the customer experience.

Though SMS is very reliable, it can be subject to delayed or dropped delivery thanks to snags such as high network loads, unreliable carriers in some countries, and a host of other issues.

But when SMS authentication fails, organizations can easily implement a fallback channel for authentication that doesn't require passcodes: voice messages. Voice has the same advantages of ubiquity and intuitive use that SMS offers. Because voice calls sync immediately versus being stored or forwarded like SMS, voice calls are prioritized on the carrier network, and as a result, they're more reliable than SMS. And the combination of SMS with voice fallback is the most reliable of all.

The same benefits of voice fallback apply to other types of SMS alerts and notifications. What's more, if a business needs to support multiple markets, then setting up voice notifications to support different languages can be a huge plus for customer experience.

Now let's go beyond channels and consider your whole communications platform. Why risk your platform being a single point of failure? Taking a multivendor approach can help ensure that your critical voice calls and messages get delivered. If one vendor has an outage, you should have a backup ready to go.



9. Carrier network matters

If you want to create great customer experiences, you can't take carrier quality for granted.

When Plivo started out 10 years ago, we assumed it didn't matter what carriers we used. Coverage was the key, or so we thought. Instead, we learned that for our customers to be able to reliably reach their own customers, we had to put together our own network of high-quality carriers, and that:

- Strong technology and infrastructure alone cannot compensate for poor carrier network quality.
- Relying on aggregators is not a good way to ensure carrier network quality.
- Building a premium carrier network requires redundancy.
- The infrastructure and technology layer all need to have the same commitment to quality.
- No provider can build a quality carrier network overnight.

Our advice to you: Be proactive and don't accept carrier network quality as a given. [Download our carrier network white paper](#) to learn what powers quality in voice and SMS APIs, including:

- The factors that contribute to carrier network quality
- The expertise required to build a high-quality carrier network
- The questions you should ask to validate a provider's carrier network quality

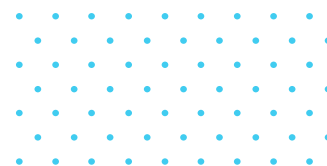


10. Choose a provider that's committed to your success

Using a cloud platform for communication services beats maintaining your own infrastructure. When you use a cloud CPaaS provider, you don't need to buy and maintain expensive equipment, or handle carrier relationships in-house. You also don't need expensive expert developers to keep the software updated.

But even when you choose the simplicity of a cloud platform, nobody gets up to speed right away, and everyone bumps up against roadblocks now and then. When you hit one of those speed bumps, you need knowledgeable tech support — and a partner who cares about your success.

Look for a vendor that makes your success their priority, as Plivo does:



A consultative approach to support

We're still here for you after you've successfully gotten up and running. Some of our resources are always available online. When you need help, the first thing you can turn to is our documentation, which provides concept tutorials, getting started documents, how-to guides, and reference materials.

If you still have questions, you can visit our support portal, which provides resources to answer frequently asked questions, implementation guides, and details about all the elements of Plivo's platform.

Even the best documentation and online support, however, can't solve all problems. That's why we offer a range of support plans to meet any organization's needs, from a free basic plan that provides access to support engineers to 24x7 premium support that comes with a three-hour service-level agreement (SLA). Businesses that need assistance can gain access to dedicated solution engineers for guidance on complex integrations and issue resolution. Plivo is one of the few CPaaS providers that offers technical support on a one-on-one, per-customer basis.



Personalized onboarding assistance

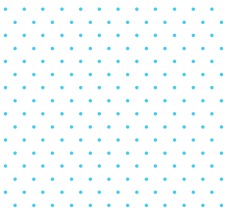
Getting started with new software can be tough. With a platform as comprehensive as Plivo, it can be difficult to figure out how to start. That's why Plivo provides personalized assistance to all new customers at no extra cost. A Plivo solutions engineer works with each customer's dev team to lay out requirements, guide them through implementation, weigh in on a testing plan, and help with debugging if necessary. When the customer is ready to go live, the SE and our support team take special note so they can handle anything urgent. We stay available for as much time as it takes for the customer to prepare for launch. After launch we assign each customer a customer success manager to provide ongoing assistance and advice.



Ensuring customer success

Our commitment to our customers doesn't end when their systems are working. To help you get the most from us, we want to know about your business and how you use Plivo. We provide every customer with a dedicated customer success contact who acts as their organization's personal ambassador. Your customer success manager will get to know you and your business issues. They can suggest solutions. They can hold your hand over carrier connectivity, billing, and renewal issues. They'll keep you in the loop about new Plivo solutions and policies. And they'll act as your advocate with other Plivo team members.

Our customer success team has a great track record of keeping customers happy. They're one of our not-so-secret weapons in our mission to provide superlative customer experience.





Our relationships carry the day

With telecommunications, not all problems come from the customer side of the connection. Often businesses have issues with carrier networks and connectivity, and sometimes you have to deal with the carriers to fix things. But you shouldn't have to — you should be able to rely on your API provider to troubleshoot and resolve issues from end to end.

Plivo customers know that we'll get them back in business quickly. Our support teams can take the lead in troubleshooting network issues. We have direct carrier relationships with dozens of telecom providers around the world, and dedicated in-house teams for each country's providers. They understand the complex telco laws and regulations, which leads to faster issue resolution than API vendors that have to rely on aggregators, gateway providers, and resellers can provide.



CPaaS: business communications as a service

We've thrown a lot of abbreviations at you — SMS, IVR, 2FA, and OTP. But there's one more that brings them all together: CPaaS, or communications platform as a service.

As industry analyst IDC describes them, "CPaaS platforms offer cloud-based communications APIs that make it easy to integrate services into critical business processes, such as customer relationship management (CRM), logistics, transactions, and customer support. CPaaS also allows the rapid implementation of customer engagement solutions at scale using real-time APIs to engage with customers across a variety of channels and use cases such as voice, SMS, and two-factor authentication."

In other words, a CPaaS can help you keep your business communications on pace with the rapid changes we're seeing today. And what's more, those 10 tips you just finished reading? The right CPaaS will help you accomplish all of them.

According to industry analyst Future Market Insights (FMI), the CPaaS market is expected to reach \$60 billion in sales by 2032, driven by increasing demand for customer communication and engagement across financial services and retail.

If you'd like to learn more about how thousands of innovative businesses rely on Plivo for their customer engagement, visit www.plivo.com.