

## 2.5.2: Instant Messaging and Text

### Learning Objectives

- Compare different methods of instant messaging and text services

Short Message Service (SMS), or text messages, have a place in the digital business communication toolbox. One useful feature of an SMS network is the ability to broadcast short bursts of information to mobile devices in the case of an emergency. There are other applications that fall into the “do not reply” category, such as one-way text messages that are widely used. We are now commonly contacted by our mobile phone carrier to be informed that a bill is due, our bank to let us know that an account is overdrawn, or a pharmacy sends us a reminder to pick up a prescription. Also, companies can take advantage of SMS technology for marketing campaigns in order to engage customers with automated prompts and responses.

Instant messaging (IM) is becoming increasingly popular as a business communication tool, especially for more informal communication. Some examples of widely used IM services are Google Talk (commonly called Google Chat), Slack, Jabber, Spark, and many more. The advantages of IM are that messages are sent and received instantly in real time and responses are organized in a “conversation” format that supports two-way communication. Colleagues working on a shared project but separated by distance can chat just as if they are in the cubicle next door. During conference calls with a customer, a sales team can pass information “privately” to one another to comment on what is being said.

The following example is of a private chat between Peter and Tom—sales people on a conference call with a prospective customer. Peter and Tom’s conversation would be considered a backchannel chat. This is when individuals use networked computers (often via IM) to maintain a real-time online conversation alongside the primary group activity or live spoken conversation.

**Peter:** It’s 1:00. When did our prospect say he would join us on this conference call?

**Tom:** Oh, he’s logging in now.

**Peter:** Did I just hear him say that he was late because his call with our competitor ran over?

**Tom:** Yup. We’ll need to change our agenda a bit. Why don’t you ask him what he thought about the competitor’s product?

**Peter:** OK, that worked. We have a better story for ease-of-use. Let’s jump right to that portion of our presentation.

**Tom:** Sounds good.

Tom has left the session....

Another useful application of IM is interactive customer support. More and more, customers are invited to chat online with a specialist while visiting a company support web site, or when they are on hold on the phone.

When using IM and SMS communication tools, it is important to remember that even though these messaging systems feel more informal, you are still acting in a professional setting. When chatting across an internal IM system with a coworker who is a personal friend, it’s likely acceptable for you to omit capitalization and punctuation marks. However, when talking with a customer or with coworker or manager about a company-related topic, you should to communicate in a professional manner.

### Compare and Contrast

Take a look at these IM conversations and compare the language used in each:

#### Casual Conversation

Camila: hey question do you still need an ID number in each order? because right now none of these have any of those and I’m not sure whether I should put them in  
Annie: yeah, there should be  
Camila: cool cool i’ll add them  
Annie: thanks bro

### Professional Conversation

Camila: Hey, I'm looking over the order forms you sent me, and I had a quick question. Do you still need an ID number in each order? Because right now, none of them have one, and I'm not sure whether I should put them in.

Annie: Oh, right. Yes, there should be an ID number on each.

Camila: Perfect. I'll add them to the forms then.

Annie: Thank you so much!

If Camila and Annie are close friends working together, then the first conversation is a perfect use of IM, especially since both are using the same casual manner. However if they had a more professional relationship (or if only one of them were using causal conversation), then this would be a poor usage of IM.

While IM and SMS are great digital communication tools, there are some disadvantages to these methods. Some companies do not even allow the use of them due to security and liability concerns. Sending company information over public IM services could be risky. Also, IMs and texts create distraction for many employees, especially if engaged in a conversation with an important customer or trying to IM while driving.

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