Bulk Text Message Services: Enabling Conversation between the Government and Its Citizens

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The development of communication technology has accelerated in the past couple of decades due to the Internet and mobile technology. SMS, short message services, or text messages were thought to be used for personal conversations, but soon the government of many nations, developed as well as developing, has realised the potential of sending text messages to converse with the public. With over half of the worldâ€™s population connected via mobile telecommunication, and its extensive penetration in many developed countries, it is only apt that the countryâ€™s administration looks at this mean of communication. Governments in countries like US, England, Australia, New Zealand, India, etc. have implemented various schemes/projects, wherein mobile text messaging is used to attain information and services, and to a great extent they have succeeded.

The most important requirement for any government to succeed in using this technology is an IT system/setup that is secure and reliable. This system along with SMS gateway technology would allow two-way communication between the government PCs and the public mobile phones. Adding SMS API to this will make the system more efficient and easy to handle. The system should be able to handle any extreme situations like when there is tremendous response to the project and also when there is no response. The SMS gateway also allows bulk sending of text messages to the masses as well as receiving bulk messages from them. A variety of scenarios can arise and all such situations should be properly examined and solutions should be prepared to make this system reliable and productive for both the government and its people.

Letâ€™s look at various scenarios where text message can be a useful tool for governments and its citizens:

1) Notification Services: Whether it is extreme weather, changes in the bus timetable or filing taxes reminders, governments in Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, etc. have introduce a free of charge services for various important notifications that can make a difference to the public. And indeed these services has made a difference, many countries reported a rise in the number of people filing their taxes on time after the system was implemented.

2) Request Services: This type of service asks the citizens to send a query or request in the form of text messages and immediately get a response or reply from the government. E.g. In New Zealand, to check if a second hand car has any overdue fines, people can easily text the number plate and get a reply right there at the car showroom.

3) Action Services: This type of service asks the citizens to send text message of reports, complaints and suggestions to the government and strict action will be taken immediately. This is an ideal solution for municipality corporations of the world, as the area with maximum complaints can be found along with the major problems can be known and based on this information immediate action plan can be created on whom to deploy and where they should be deployed.

4) General Services: Notification of received payment, sending text messages during election campaigns, etc. can be considered under this service.

Thus, we can see the various domains where the government can send text messages to its citizens for their welfare and similarly the citizens can send the same for improvement of their neighbourhood and better administration of the government. Citizens can avail numerous services

from the government by sending a simple message, provided their government implements such beneficial systems.

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