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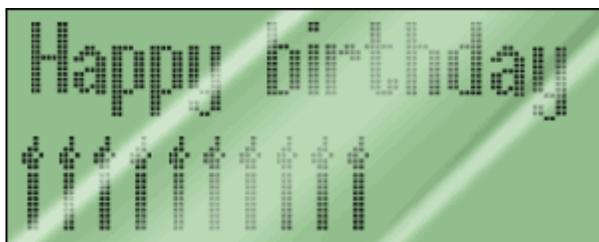
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Hppy bthdy txt!



The text message is 10 years old! Surprised? Why did it take us so long to discover the joy of text and what's next for mssngn?

On 3 December 1992, an engineer called Neil Papworth sent the text "MERRY CHRISTMAS" to colleagues at Vodafone. The rest of us were lucky if we had access to SMS (short message service) to wish anybody "HPPY MLLNIUM".

So why the seven-year lag between Mr Papworth's seasonal greeting and the texting explosion in UK, where two million messages are now sent every hour?

"Technologies like SMS always have a greater impact than people think they will, but also always take longer than people think to have an impact," says Andrew Bud, managing director of SMS transmission company mBlox.

Two things delayed the UK's love affair with saying things in 160 characters (including spaces).

The mobile phone networks didn't allow users to SMS people subscribed to rival companies until 1999. Mr Bud says the decision to allow messages to be sent between networks made SMS "100 times more useful".

Mr Bud also says the text didn't come of age until it had found its natural market - young



Text at 10

- 16 billion texts will have been sent in 2002
- 70% of mobile phone owners use SMS
- 53 million texts were sent on A-Level results day 2002
- Text speed record is 40 characters in 27.16 seconds



Time to ditch your tie?

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people. When pre-paid phones arrived in the late 1990s, they proved far more attractive to teenagers than complex tariffs and contracts.

Thumbs up

These pay-as-you-go users found their money went further with texting - which some networks originally neglected to charge for.

This generosity was shortlived. The networks were surprised by the popularity of texting, but have made up for it by milking their cash cow with gusto.

Most of the UK's 40 million mobile phone users pay 10p or more to use SMS - many times the cost of relaying the texts to their intended recipient.



Praise be for opposable thumbs!

Mr Bud says the latest, super duper third generation mobile phone data is charged at £3 per megabyte. For every megabyte of SMS data, the networks charge users £700.

UK texters don't seem to mind this eye-watering mark-up - on Valentine's Day 2002, 57.5 million were sent, more than double the previous year's figure.

The explosion in use has had its drawbacks. While 95% of texts are delivered within 10 seconds - according to the Mobile Data Association - some SMS systems can become overloaded and unceremoniously dump excess texts.

U WOT?

Thanks to those that actually get through, the text has become ubiquitous in British life, even spawning a new lexicon of words abbreviated to get as much out of the 160-character limit as possible.

These trunk8ed - ;) - words have infuriated those who fear for the survival of proper English. Also those not fully initiated into the parallel grammatical universe of 8s, Rs, Us and acronyms can be left utterly confused, if not a bit :(and in need of the SMS DXNRE.

Texts have proved themselves life savers though, allowing those

in distress to raise the alarm. In 2001, 19-year-old Rebecca Fyfe sent a text mayday from her stricken boat ship in the Lombok Strait off Indonesia to her boyfriend in England. "Call Falmouth Coastguard, we need help - SOS."



Sinking Britons sent a text from the Lombok Strait

Even RAF rescuers used SMS when all their more sophisticated equipment to find a missing climber in Snowdonia.

"This is the RAF. We are trying to find you. Unable to find you at this moment. Can you contact us?" Pilot Officer Russ Gleeson texted a 59-year-old man injured in a fall.

So is this 10th anniversary the high water mark for the text? No, says Andrew Bud.

He predicts that 2003 will be the year of the text - with SMS reaching 85% of 18-65-year-olds, he says companies will use texts to communicate with customers and employees.

"SMS will continue to be the main mobile phone medium for at least the next seven years, and there may be no substitute when you want to flash off a teenie, weenie little message to your friends."

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