

Uganda: SMS marketing irks MTN subscribers



By [Walter Wafula](#)

4 Sep 2008

Mobile phone communication is meant to ease life and add flavour to it, however it is also turning out to be a nuisance to Ugandans. In the past three weeks, fed-up subscribers of MTN Uganda have continuously and publicly complained of unsolicited marketing messages from the company with threats to quit its network.

Annabel. O, a subscriber on the network, published her complaint in the *Daily Monitor* newspaper of August 27, 2008. She said, "I am really growing weary of all the unsolicited text messages on all kinds of subjects, some of which I see as a rubbish." Annabel further said that despite her spending her money to get rid of the messages by asking MTN to stop the service, nothing has been done and she is still getting the messages. "This is very irritating and time consuming. If this doesn't stop, then I and others on the network will consider taking measures against MTN," she said.

In response, to its customers on promotional text messages MTN said it had taken note of the inappropriate and increasing conduct from some of its content partners and was taking steps to address the problem. "Content providers have been instructed to implement an 'unsubscribe' option to the spam messages with immediate effect," MTN management said on September 4. Other measures will be communicated to customers in due course.

These text messages are usually for promotional purposes, urging customers to take part in competitions, to attend a show or to request for certain information. Some of the mobile phone content providers in Uganda include; SMS Media, True African, and now Ad Mobile - which has promised to pay subscribers to receive content.

These companies have a partnership with MTN as one of its efforts, to offer a variety of mobile-based information services as requested by the customers. Information includes forex rates, sports scores, news, religious quotes, commodity prices, cinema updates.

MTN said its agreement with the companies provides that in all these instances of promotional material, customers are expected to accept to receive the information by either sending a key word to a designated number or by subscribing to receiving the news on a regular basis.

"Customers should not receive any other type of information other than what they have requested for before," MTN said. This however is contrary to what subscribers are experiencing because the companies neither ask for or forward passwords but rather bombard them with spam SMS on a daily basis.

MTN observed that promotional messages have grown in popularity globally and the trend is expected to continue with associated unforeseen problems. "The challenge for the mobile telephone industry in general and MTN in particular is to

ensure utmost respect for the privacy and rights of our customers,” MTN said.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

Walter Wafula is a seasoned journalist who has reported for the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in Kampala-Uganda. He is also a contributor on Bizcommunity.com website. Email Walter at wafwalt@yahoo.com and connect on LinkedIn.

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