



CHANNEL WHITEPAPER

# RCS

# Business Messaging

*The next evolution of A2P SMS — technical fundamentals, what changed when Apple added RCS support, deployment patterns for enterprises, and the lessons learned from early adopter projects.*

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

# RCS, finally: a practical guide for 2026

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Rich Communication Services (RCS) has been "the future of messaging" for more than a decade. In 2026, it finally is. Apple's addition of RCS support in iOS 18 removed the last major device gap; carrier coverage is now global in all markets that matter commercially; and MaaP hubs make enterprise deployment practical without per-carrier negotiations. This guide is the enterprise-facing reference that reflects that reality rather than the 2018-era optimism.

Written for digital, marketing, CX and product leaders evaluating RCS for their channel mix. The 2026 revision covers iOS rollout impact, verified-sender registration processes, current MaaP platform choices, and the compliance picture — which is the same as SMS but often mis-explained.

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**A note on vendor mentions.** Where specific vendors are named — including IDM and our sister company AnyMessage — we identify them clearly. RCS deployment depends on a specific ecosystem (Google MaaP, Apple's iOS integration, carrier enablement); the strategic frameworks here are useful regardless of which messaging vendor a reader ultimately chooses.

## CHAPTER 01

# RCS defined — what it actually is

*A clear definition, the distinction between RCS and RBM, why MaaP hubs matter, and the verified-sender concept that makes enterprise RCS commercially viable.*

## A working definition

**Rich Communication Services (RCS)** is a GSMA-standardised successor to SMS and MMS that runs as an IP-based service on top of the mobile network. For consumers, it enables read receipts, typing indicators, group chat, high-resolution media, and the enhanced features typical of modern messaging apps — delivered through the native Messages app rather than a third-party platform. It was first standardised in 2008 and has gone through multiple iterations since.

**RCS Business Messaging (RBM)** is the enterprise-facing channel built on top of consumer RCS. Think of the relationship as comparable to SMS versus A2P SMS: RCS is the consumer capability, RBM is how enterprises send structured, branded, feature-rich messages over it. Verified senders, rich cards, suggested replies, carousel messages and chatbot integration are all RBM capabilities, not consumer-RCS capabilities.

## The MaaP hub

**Messaging as a Platform (MaaP)** hubs are the commercial infrastructure that makes enterprise RCS practical. Rather than negotiating individually with each carrier, enterprises work with one MaaP hub that federates to the carriers' RCS networks. Google's Jibe MaaP is by far the dominant one globally. A small number of regional hubs operate alongside it, particularly in markets where local regulators require in-country operation.

## Verified senders

Every enterprise RBM sender must be registered and verified. The process mirrors domain verification for email or sender-ID registration for SMS in India and the Gulf: the enterprise demonstrates ownership of the brand, provides logos and agent descriptors, and — once approved — can send from a verified identity that appears on the handset with a blue checkmark and the verified brand logo rather than a number.

### WHY VERIFIED SENDERS MATTER COMMERCIALY

Fraud and impersonation are the two largest consumer-trust problems in SMS today. RBM's verified-sender mechanism is the first credible industry-wide answer: a brand logo on a verified sender carries trust that no SMS sender ID has carried since spam made "+44 text messages" a warning sign. Engagement numbers from early deployments consistently show 2–5× click-through uplift on verified RCS vs. comparable SMS.

## CHAPTER 02

# The 2026 deployment picture

Where RCS is actually available — by carrier, by device, by country — and the two developments that moved it from "emerging" to "production" between 2023 and 2026.

## Device coverage — the iOS 18 effect

Android RCS support via Google Messages has been effectively universal in supported markets since 2022. The major gap until late 2024 was Apple: iPhones did not support RCS, which meant enterprises planning RCS campaigns had to assume a substantial fraction of their audience would fall back to SMS. **Apple added RCS support in iOS 18**, and by the end of 2025 adoption had reached majority share of active iPhones. In 2026, for most markets, a recent iPhone and a recent Android handset behave comparably with respect to inbound RBM.

## Carrier coverage

RCS reaches subscribers only where their home operator has deployed an RCS network (or opted into Jibe's cloud service). Coverage by country is now high in the following markets relevant for most enterprise campaigns:



### Europe — strong coverage

Germany, France, UK, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Nordics all deployed. Operators on Jibe cloud or own RCS networks. Regulatory environment is GDPR/ePrivacy standard — see Chapter 5.



### North America — transformed

Major US carriers deployed; iOS 18 support closed the main gap. Canada broadly supported. Mexico coverage expanding. 10DLC registration requirements for SMS do not apply to RBM but analogous verification process exists.



### LATAM — Brazil-led

Brazil has been a leading RCS market globally due to high Android penetration and strong carrier support. Mexico, Argentina, Chile expanding. Regional MaaP partnerships common.



### India — high penetration

One of the largest RCS markets globally by message volume. Operates under TRAI regulation with sender-registration requirements analogous to SMS DLT. Strong growth trajectory.



### Gulf — growing

UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar progressing. Sender-ID registration regimes parallel SMS practice. Some jurisdictions require locally-hosted MaaP or data-residency agreements.



### Asia — fragmented

Japan and Korea have their own RCS-adjacent standards. China does not deploy RCS; native super-apps dominate. Southeast Asia coverage patchy, expanding.

#### PLANNING IMPLICATION

For global enterprises, RCS is now a strong primary channel in the markets above, with SMS as fallback. For enterprises focused on Western Europe, North America, Brazil and India, RCS should be the default for any campaign where rich content and verified sender branding improve outcomes.

## CHAPTER 03

# Capabilities & use cases

*The RBM feature set that distinguishes it from SMS, and the five enterprise use cases that extract disproportionate value from those features.*

## What RBM adds beyond SMS

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT ENABLES
<b>Verified sender identity</b>	Brand name, logo and blue checkmark on the handset. Replaces numeric or alphanumeric sender IDs.
<b>Rich cards</b>	Image, title, description and action buttons in a single structured message. Suitable for product showcases, booking confirmations with map links, appointment reminders with reschedule actions.
<b>Carousel messages</b>	Multiple rich cards in a single swipeable message. Useful for product recommendations, menu browsing, service comparison.
<b>Suggested replies</b>	Tappable quick-response buttons below a message. Replaces typed STOP, HELP, YES/NO interactions.

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT ENABLES
<b>Suggested actions</b>	Buttons that trigger phone calls, map launches, calendar events, URL opens, or location requests, handled natively by the handset.
<b>Rich media</b>	Images up to typically 100KB, short video, audio, structured documents. Quality and size limits vary by carrier.
<b>Read receipts &amp; typing</b>	Sender sees when the recipient has read a message. Recipient sees typing indicator when an agent is composing. Consent-driven in most markets.
<b>Two-way conversational</b>	Full conversational threads — the RBM agent can run structured dialogues, or hand off to a human agent seamlessly.

## Where RBM produces outsize value

Five use cases consistently return the strongest measurable uplift over SMS for early-adopter enterprises:

- **Marketing with visual content** — fashion, retail, travel. Rich cards with imagery replace SMS+URL patterns and substantially reduce drop-off.
- **Delivery notifications with actions** — reschedule, confirm location, contact courier. Actions as tappable buttons rather than URL hand-offs.
- **Appointment management** — confirm, reschedule, cancel as suggested actions. Significantly reduces no-show rate without any staff call effort.
- **Customer service transfers** — escalation from SMS to a conversational RCS agent, with human handoff when needed. Reduces inbound call volume.
- **Account alerts with actions** — fraud notifications with "was this you?" tappable responses; payment confirmations with receipt links.

### WHAT NOT TO USE RCS FOR

One-time passwords. RCS delivery, while generally good, does not match SMS for sub-three-second global deliverability, and the OTP fallback experience from RCS to SMS adds latency to the worst-case path. Keep OTP on SMS. Use RCS for everything where a rich experience improves outcomes.

## CHAPTER 04

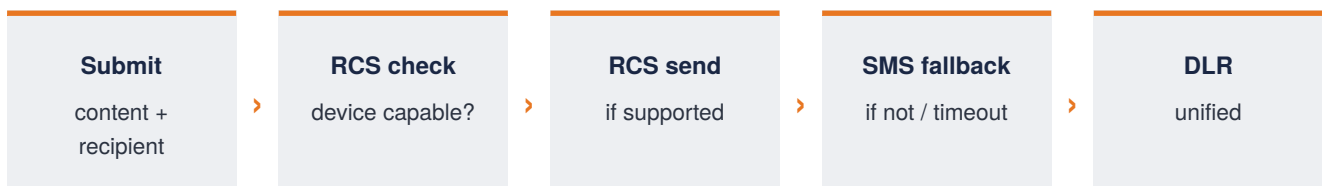
# Deployment patterns

*Orchestration, SMS fallback, unified reporting — how RCS fits into an existing messaging stack rather than replacing it.*

## Treat RCS as a render path, not a separate channel

The most common enterprise mistake with RCS is operating it as a standalone channel, with separate campaign tools, separate opt-in lists and separate reporting. The stronger pattern — now emerging as the industry default — is to treat RCS and SMS as two render paths of a single "messaging" channel. The orchestration layer decides, per recipient and per message, which path to use; the enterprise operates one opt-in list, one campaign design, one reporting dashboard.

## The fallback cascade



Each arrow hides engineering. The RCS capability check takes time; enterprises trade off between waiting for a definitive answer and falling back fast. The fallback SMS typically needs different content (shorter, with a URL where the RCS had tappable actions). DLR unification requires correlating RCS delivery receipts with SMS receipts across the fallback boundary. A serious CPaaS handles all of this; a home-grown integration usually does not.

## Unified reporting — the metric that matters

In mature RCS deployments the top-line metric is no longer "RCS delivery rate" or "SMS delivery rate" in isolation. It is **end-to-end message delivery rate** — did the recipient, through whichever render path, receive the message — plus **RCS penetration**, the fraction that reached the recipient via the richer channel. Both numbers track over time as carrier and device coverage expand.

**IDM's RCS roadmap.** IDM is deploying RCS Business Messaging as an extension of IMT-HUB®, integrated with our existing SMS orchestration so that enterprise customers operate one platform, one opt-in list, and one reporting surface across both channels. AnyMessage offers the same pattern under the same group umbrella. The global CPaaS platforms offer comparable RCS-plus-SMS orchestration; for enterprises where EU data residency matters, we are one of the shortlist candidates to compare.

## CHAPTER 05

# Compliance & data protection

*Why GDPR, ePrivacy and national rules apply to RCS exactly the same way they apply to SMS — and the two additional compliance dimensions specific to RCS that most enterprises overlook.*

## The core rule is identical to SMS

Every legal requirement that applies to commercial SMS in the EU applies equally to RBM. GDPR governs processing of the phone number and associated personal data; ePrivacy Directive Article 13 requires prior consent for direct marketing messages, with the narrow soft opt-in exception for existing customers. A valid SMS marketing opt-in is a valid RCS marketing opt-in; neither gives you permission to send the other without the recipient having reasonably understood the scope at the point of consent.

This creates an operational subtlety: if your enterprise collected opt-in years ago for "SMS marketing from us," you should review whether the consent scope reasonably covers rich, branded, two-way RCS messaging, or whether you need to re-confirm consent before enabling RCS delivery to that subscriber base. The conservative answer — and the one German and French regulators have signalled preference for in informal guidance — is to re-confirm.

## Two RCS-specific compliance dimensions

### 1 · Verified-sender registration

The brand-verification process for RBM involves sharing corporate information, logos, and agent descriptions with the MaaP provider (typically Google for enterprises using Jibe). Some enterprises treat this as a commercial procedure; legally it involves sharing corporate trademarks and identity data with a US-based processor, which interacts with GDPR transfer rules for any tenant data flowing through the verification process.

### 2 · Read receipts and interaction data

RCS generates materially more subscriber interaction data than SMS: read receipts, typing indicators, button taps, rich-card interactions, carousel scroll behaviour. All of this is personal data under GDPR. Your DPIA should explicitly address what interaction data is collected, for what purpose, with what retention, and whether it flows to sub-processors.

### PRACTICAL COMPLIANCE STEPS

Before launching RBM: update your privacy notice to describe RCS-specific data collection; review opt-in scope and re-confirm where necessary; sign DPAs covering RCS with your messaging vendor; document your MaaP hub as a sub-processor; run a DPIA for RBM separately from SMS.

## CHAPTER 06

# Lessons from early adopters

*What went right, what went wrong, and what enterprises deploying RCS in 2026 can do differently — drawn from published case studies and accumulated experience across EU and APAC deployments.*

## What worked

- **Rich media in transactional flows.** Delivery notifications with photo-of-package-at-door, appointment reminders with map and staff name, order confirmations with product imagery — consistently improved satisfaction scores and reduced inbound service contacts.
- **Verified sender as anti-phishing.** Banks and public-sector senders using verified-brand RBM reported significant drops in subscriber reports of impersonation.
- **Suggested actions for no-shows.** Appointment reminders with inline reschedule and cancel actions typically reduced no-show rates without extra staff calls.
- **Progressive rollout.** Enterprises that launched RBM on a subset of markets and use cases before going broad had materially smoother experiences than big-bang launches.

## What went wrong

- **Treating RCS as separate from SMS.** Separate teams, separate tools, separate metrics produced operational fragmentation that most enterprises regretted within 12 months.
- **Overinvesting in feature parity.** Some enterprises built elaborate carousels and multi-step conversational flows that consumers did not engage with. Simpler use cases (rich card + 1–2 suggested actions) consistently outperformed.
- **Underestimating fallback.** The SMS fallback path was often an afterthought; content designed for RBM cards translated poorly to 160-character SMS. Fallback content design needs parallel care.
- **Ignoring compliance step-up.** Enterprises that assumed existing SMS consent covered RCS found themselves in difficult conversations with DPOs six months into deployment.

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*"RCS is not SMS with pictures. It is a different channel with a different grammar — and the enterprises that treat it as a pure visual upgrade to SMS consistently underperform the ones that design for the channel."*

— SUMMARY OBSERVATION ACROSS EARLY ADOPTER PROJECTS

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## What to do differently in 2026

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1. Start with one rich use case where the uplift is measurable (appointment reminders with reschedule, delivery notifications with imagery, fraud alerts with response actions). Prove the ROI before broadening.
2. Unify orchestration from day one — one platform, one opt-in list, one dashboard across SMS and RCS.
3. Over-invest in fallback content design, not in RCS feature complexity.
4. Update privacy notices, DPIA and DPAs before launch, not after.
5. Measure end-to-end delivery rate, not RCS-specific metrics in isolation.

**Where IDM fits for RCS-SMS convergence.** For enterprises who want unified RCS and SMS orchestration under EU jurisdiction, with a named European service relationship and German-hosted infrastructure, IDM and sister company **AnyMessage** are among the natural shortlist candidates. For enterprises whose primary requirement is breadth of tangential channels (email, voice, deep WhatsApp Business integration), a comparison against global CPaaS players is worth including alongside us.

## ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

**interactive digital media GmbH**

IDM is a German cloud communication service provider founded in 2003 and headquartered in Lübeck. Our proprietary **IMT-HUB®** platform, now in its fourth generation, is one of approximately 40 GSMA Open Connectivity (OC) certified SMS hubs worldwide. We serve enterprises, mobile operators and service providers across every major industry, with infrastructure hosted entirely in Germany. Since 2024, IDM has been part of the **United Capital / AnyMessage group**; our sister company AnyMessage operates complementary messaging infrastructure, and together we represent a European messaging group with particular strength in regulated, compliance-sensitive deployments.

**Who we serve**

IDM serves enterprise clients across banking, automotive, healthcare, research, retail, tourism and the public sector, together with carrier partners across the EU, GCC and international hub networks. Because messaging is mission-critical for many of our clients, we name specific references only with prior written consent and on a case-by-case basis — available on request under NDA.

**TALK TO US**

If this guide raised questions about your RCS roadmap, vendor set, or SMS-RCS convergence — we are happy to talk. Enterprise enquiries: [sales@i-digital-m.com](mailto:sales@i-digital-m.com). Carriers, aggregators and resellers: [partners@i-digital-m.com](mailto:partners@i-digital-m.com). Or call **+49 (0)451 31 70 21-0**.



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