

# SMS Text News

Your hub for mobile news. Put this in your feed reader and have a scan every now and then to track what's cooking around the world.

## ALOHA TEXTER!

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SMS Text News is blogged by Ewan MacLeod, co-founder and CEO of [Neo One](#). More [about me](#).

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### Questions, Comments?

Send them to me at [ewan@smstextnews.com](mailto:ewan@smstextnews.com).

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JULY 24, 2006

## 15 Questions for Sarah McVittie of 82ask.com



I've been following [82ask.com](#) ever since it launched. The simplicity and value of the service really astounded me -- it's one of just a few truly innovative services. I

can remember thinking the consumer brand, 82ask, was a work of genius. Not only is it distinctive, it also spells out their dedicated shortcode.

Generally speaking, if you work hard enough, you can probably an answer to your question from Google -- indeed, if you've got your handset in front of you, Google Mobile is pretty efficient. However, if your question is a little more complex than 'What's the capital of Australia', you generally need to do quite a lot of re-querying and clicking about to get the answer. As mega networker Oli Barrett put it in a quick [interview](#) I did with him a while ago:

*I use [82ask] a couple of times a week when I'm out and about, away from Google, and need a quick answer to something. A mobile service which saves me time – how refreshing!*

I'd never used it myself [until last week](#). This wasn't through design -- it was because I'd never had a good enough question. I didn't want to waste the 82ask team's time with an inane 'test' to see if they could tell me how many bunny rabbits there are in Northern Ireland (900,000 according to the 82ask

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[Telegraph Interview](#)). I already bought the concept -- I already got it -- so I waited until I really, really needed to know something and whacked off the question. The answer arrived almost instantaneously. Phenomenal. What's more, I couldn't tell you the 82ask shortcode. I can't remember it. It doesn't matter. I just whacked in 8-2-a-s-k and sent off my message!

Justin Davies of BuddyPing in his [recent interview](#) raved about the service, so I was delighted when I got the opportunity to put some questions to Sarah.

As always, I started off with a few standard ones and then went on from there. Off we go!

### 1. What was your first mobile? Make/model/network

I can't remember the exact model. I was at University, it was in 1999 and it was a pay-as-you-go phone on Orange.

### 2. Talk us through your current personal mobile strategy - what device(s) are you using and why?

I only really use my phone for texts, calls and email so I have a Motorola V3 for the texts and voice and a Blackberry for the emails!

### 3. Give us an overview of 82ask. Is this your first venture? What prompted you to setup the service?

Yes, 82ASK is my first foray into running a business. Basically, 82ASK enables anyone on any of the six UK mobile networks to text any question to 82275 and receive an accurate answer in minutes. We were the first service of its kind to market, and we think of ourselves as a 'mobile find' (rather than 'mobile search') solution. We charge £1 for each answer – if we can't answer (which is really rare), we don't charge you, and we don't charge for clarification or customer service.

The idea for the service hit me in 2003 when I worked as a Financial Analyst in the City. Slaving away into the wee hours one night my boss sent an email

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#### Leonard Low

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Online Campus Manager/Educational Technology Strategist

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My BuddyPing



### Tip Jar

Change is good

asking me for more research and I thought, I wish I could charge for this. Which quickly led to, I should charge for this! My friend Thomas Roberts (who was also at UBS with me) and I worked flat-out setting up a trial service, answering questions ourselves 24/7. Investors were initially sceptical, but the results did the talking.

People loved it (and continue to do so!), just as we knew they would. The idea was really exciting, and still is, especially when people understand just how flexible and applicable it is to their daily lives!

#### **4. You must get asked this one quite often - but I'm still curious: Can you give us some recent sample questions sent to the service?**

That's something I never get tired of! Just when you think you've been asked everything, people throw these brilliant, unexpected questions at us. We always use the best sources for the questions, and customers can check out the ones we use for each answer we send them on our website.

Here are a few recent ones that raised some eyebrows, with our answers:

***Q: What are the main differences between Marx and Weber's theories on social stratification?***

*82ASK: Marx said wealthy exploit the working class so they won't advance. Weber said that it was not just this but shaped by status and power differentials.*

***Q: How long would it take a cow to fill the grand canyon with milk?***

*82ASK: An average cow produced 29 litres of milk, produced 10 months per year. This is 8839 litres of milk per year. The Grand Canyon is 40 Billion cubed metres. It would take one cow  $4.5253988 \times 10^3$  years to fill the canyon.*

***Q: which town in England has the dirtiest birds?***

*82ASK: The dirtiest birds are in London, esp. the pigeons. This is*

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*due to smog, but apparently, even the pigeons in Trafalgar Square don't wash in the fountain!*

**Q: How tall is a Smurf?**

*82ASK: Papa Smurf is said to be '3 apples tall'. This would mean that Papa Smurf is approximately 10-12 inches tall.*

**Q: What are the four amino acid motifs which form the rep associated protein needed for rolling circle replication and what are their functions?**

*82ASK: E.coli Rep (replication associated protein) is a ssDNA helicase & has 4 domains: 1A, 1B & 2A (which bind ssDNA & ATP/ADP) & 2B (which may be regulatory).*

**Q: Where in London can I get real bone from a hip and a jaw? Animal or human?**

*82ASK: Smithfield Market is your best place to pick up stray bones as it its home to many fine old-fashioned butchers.*

**Q: How many badgers would it take to support the Empire State building?**

*82ASK: Emp. St. Bdg. is 365,000 tons. Weight of adult euro (not usa) badger av. 11 kg. So according to Newton's third law you would need 30,102,040 badgers.*

**Q: How many Lego blocks would it take to make a life sized Everest?**

*Modelling Mount Everest as a cone, approx volume is 2500 cubic kilometres. Lego brick, approx volume 5cm<sup>3</sup>. 5x10e+17 (500,000 quadrillion) Lego bricks.*

**5. Do you have any additional services coming soon? What sort of innovations do you see on the horizon for your customers?**

Yes, some really cool things are in the pipeline. We are lucky in that respect as we are able to understand what products and service our customers would like

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by analysing their responses to answers we give out. So we work on developing additional services that we know 82askers want.

**6. List the UK mobile operators and your experiences and views of them.**

I think all of the operators have an interesting time ahead of them ensuring they can maintain their hold in the industry.

*Vodafone:* Feedback from our users are that Vodafone is still charging its customers too much for roaming abroad. Our service can be accessed from a UK handset from anywhere in the world, and whilst our charge to the customer is always the same, high roaming tariffs with inflated SMS prices act as a potential barrier for growth across the industry.

*O2:* O2 are very good at doing the glossy, sexy stuff like their recent Streetmap integration. They really are trying to position themselves to be at the forefront of user experience – particularly with global positioning technology and rich media downloading to handsets. Having said this, there have been major issue with the 3G content being overpriced and substandard in quality. What also lets O2 down is its inconsistent levels of customer service, which although is cross-network issue, is something that O2 is regularly criticised for. Networks need to get the user-experience / customer service balance right if they want their customers to experiment with new product and service offerings.

*Orange:* The best advantages of the Orange World Access packs are the reduced out-of-bundle rates for data access. Orange's smartphone series with integrated Windows Mobile 5.0, shows that it is a serious contender within the business usage space, competing against the corporate services heavyweights like Blackberry. I was on an Orange contract for many years, and never had any major issues with service. I think Orange's pay-as-you-go packages are still one of the more competitive deals offered by a major network.

*3:* Have come back fighting from a relatively negative brand perception a few years ago, to become a leading voice on rich-media mobile content. 3 continues

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to be both innovative and different.

*T-mobile:* The relatively new web 'n walk tariff shows that T-mobile are serious about bringing a breath of much needed fresh air to the data charging debate that surrounds the UK and European mobile industry. So far, consumer resistance towards mobile web has been mainly price-related. Hopefully by bringing out more pioneering pricing packages that address the question of data tariffs, T-Mobile will start prizing open the mobile-web consumer gateway for other networks to follow suit.

**7. What websites and blogs do you regularly read?**

<http://www.smstextnews.com/>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/default.stm>

<http://www.mobhappy.com/>

<http://mobilemediabusiness.blogspot.com/>

<http://battellemedia.com/>

<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/>

**8. a) What's the most innovative newest mobile service or application you've come across in the last month?**

- ShoZu – I'm loving their new ZuCast feature ([www.ShoZu.com](http://www.ShoZu.com))
- Anthropics' Face Store – addictive fun! (<http://facestore.com/>)

**8. b) What mobile service/application do you recommend we should try out?**

- [82ASK!](#)
- [SpinVox](#)

**9. List four people in the mobile industry you really rate - why?**

Tricky one – there are so many!

| **Mike Short, [O2](#)**

*I think Mike Short is great and really works to develop and grow the industry. He is a champion of 'Mobile User Experience' which is an issue particularly close to my heart – and one that urgently needs to be addressed by the industry.*

***Ben Wood – Analyst at [CCS](#)***

*What Ben doesn't know about the future of the mobile sector, frankly isn't worth knowing. He has more than 12 years experience in the mobile sector, providing thought leadership on SMS, 3G, mobile data. What makes Ben stand out from the crowd is his real understanding on what makes mobile users actually want from their handsets. He is probably the most cited mobile analyst, with regular comments appearing in the FT, Wall Street Journal and Business Week, and broadcast appearances on business programmes for the BBC, CNBC and CNN.*

***Mark Bole, [ShoZu](#)***

*Mark is a smooth operator. He has successfully grown the ShoZu brand from its Cognima heritage, winning countless international awards in less than a year. Mark is a good example of what the mobile industry could be capable of, if it threw out conventional thinking and focused on what users really want. His [blog](#) is always insightful and well informed.*

***Ari Virtanen, [Nokia Multimedia](#)***

*I saw a presentation that Ari gave in Helsinki a couple of months ago titled "Convergence in Mobile Internet Communications" and was completely blown away with his passion and vision he has for mobile technology. Ari's conviction that mobile phones are inherently changing the way that society interacts and functions totally lends itself to our philosophy at 82ASK. Handsets are much more than voice communications devices and have been for some time now. Services like 82ASK can turn any mobile phone into a*

*back-pocket concierge assistant.*

**10. What else do you use your mobile for (other than calls/text)? (Eg do u download music? Take pics? Etc)**

I've become addicted to playing mobile games on the tube. It allows me to unwind after a stressful day. Tetris and backgammon are my favourite on the V3 and I love Brickbreaker on the Blackberry. I also take occasional photos and video clips using the camera on my V3.

**11. What's your ringtone?**

It is one of the standard ringtones. I have a real problem with 'novelty' ringtones particularly when they start ringing out for all to hear on the train. I'm all for diversity... but I like to be discreet! ;)

**12. How much was your mobile bill last month?**

V3 was about £50.

**13. If you needed to buy a shortcode, who would you talk to?**

Aggregators like [MX Telecom](#) and [mBlox](#), have made it really easy to purchase both temporary and long-term shortcodes. [Fast SMS](#) has also got a really good level of customer service – particularly for mobile marketing newbies. I think that the current availability of shortcodes offers marketers a cost-effective and alternative way to look at what mobile can do for them. Instead of using traditional marketing routes to drive users to their mobile programs, they should be considering how to create and deliver a mobile extension of their Website or printed collateral. [ITAGG](#) are very good at providing complete mobile marketing solutions.

**14. What's good and what's bad with the mobile industry?**

*Good:* It is still a relatively new industry driven by constant innovation with brilliant people with real belief in the industry. The best thing is probably how fast everything moves – the pace and volume of innovation is sometimes really

exciting. Services such as mobile IM, MMS shortcoding, Mobile TV are all emerging as exciting growth areas within the sector which reflect the consumer appetite for mobile as a converged media platform.

*Bad:* Complete lack of standardisation – each part of the industry appears to pull the consumer in opposite directions. What is apparent is that there desperately needs to be more emphasis on the user experience and allowing the customers to lead the demand.

### **15. What's the last film and single/albums you bought? Any good?**

I bought 4 films in Virgin the other day:

- 7 Samurai (is an old favourite)
- Team America (laugh-out-loud funny!)
- Serenity (excellent)
- The Constant Gardner (both intelligent and moving)

I use 82ASK texpersts to advise on new film releases – and they've never let me down (so far...)!  
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Thank you Sarah!

July 24, 2006 at 10:17 AM in [People](#), [Unplugged](#) | [Permalink](#)

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