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Companies start to get the message

By Clay Lucas

Businesses are going the way of teenagers and taking to SMS.

Telecommunications specialists say business will send about 1.4 billion text messages next year, up from the 750 million business messages sent in 2004.

Telecommunications analyst AT Kearney says business communications will be the next growth area for text messaging. "Growth to this point has been in the under-19 crowd," said ATKearney's Neil Plumridge.

Small and medium-sized businesses will be the next big adopters, he says. According to FreeRein, a Melbourne-based mobile phone system provider, companies are taking up text messaging at a startling rate. FreeRein expects to double its turnover in the next year. Among its big clients are Coca-Cola Amatil and Kodak.

Text messaging reduces mobile phone bills, says FreeRein's Rohan Lean. "We reckon it averages out to about \$1.50 per call for most business calls," he said. "People ring and say g'day, and a lot of chatter goes on. And the company is paying for that chatter."

Each text message costs between 15¢ and 25¢, depending on volume, says Mr Lean.

Kodak Australia has increased its use of text messaging in its dispatch centre over the past two years, from 1400 messages a month to about 3000. It uses text messages to communicate with 95 technicians who service its photo developing units in Australia and New Zealand.

Text messages mean staff can respond when they have time, says Kodak's Ross Tate. "They're not like a ringing phone that has to be answered," he said.

One drag on the uptake of text messaging at Kodak is the age of the company's staff, he says.

"Some of our technicians are near retirement age, so (texting) is about as foreign to them as listening to an iPod," he said. Coca-Cola Amatil's sales staff and vending machine technicians began using SMS five years ago, and now send 50,000 to 80,000 messages a month.

And City Saab in North Melbourne is one of the smaller businesses using SMS.

The company sends about 40 messages every morning to remind customers they have a car service booked for the next day.

The number of missed appointments has plummeted since the service started, says City Saab's James Rao.