



**Phone:** +27 (0)21 528 3420

**Fax:** +27 (0)21 552 2848

**Website:** [www.bulksms.com](http://www.bulksms.com)

4th Floor South Lobby  
Boulevard Place Heron Crescent  
Century City 7441 South Africa

## **CASE STUDY – SOUTH AFRICA**

### **BULKSMS.COM**

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#### **SMS plays Santa and ensures gifts are delivered to underprivileged children**

The Santa Shoebox Project, which annually organises Christmas gifts from members of the public for underprivileged children, has grown from 180 Santa Shoeboxes in 2006, to a whopping 70,200 gifts collected from 36 locations in 2011. Along with this growth has come a range of logistical challenges so this year the organisers put SMS to the test to aid communication with its donors.

One of the biggest challenges the Santa Shoebox team faces is ensuring that after the donors pledge their gift boxes, they deliver them to the right place on the right date. Each donor pledges a gift box to a specific, named child, so any no-shows have to be made up at the last minute or else a child will miss out.

Typically Irenè Pieters, national co-ordinator for the Santa Shoebox Project, sees a shortfall of between 10-30% of the pledged gift boxes. This year, thanks to a donation of SMS messages by BulkSMS.com, Pieters was able to SMS reminders to donors in major centres in advance to the drop-off, and then send targeted SMS reminders to the no-shows, anywhere in the country, dramatically reducing the no-show rate.

“The result was absolutely amazing,” said Pieters. “Being able to get a direct message that was read straight away, to the donors considerably increased the number of gift boxes delivered.”

After the first drop off date in October this year, 30% of Johannesburg donors had yet to deliver their gift box. After a targeted SMS reminder was sent to the no shows, this dropped to around 12%. In Cape Town, where the Santa Shoebox Project started and home to the biggest collection points with 31,500 gift boxes pledged in total, the no show rate was reduced from 10% to 6%. And Pietermaritzburg, a new participant in 2011, initially saw only 44% of donors deliver their boxes, and this was increased to 68% after the SMS message went out.

Pieters simply integrated the BulkSMS.com service with her existing email contact lists and was able to immediately target the same groups. “SMS is a stronger direct message than email. They are read immediately which makes a huge difference. The ability to target and personalise the messages according to the location of the drop-off centre made a big difference as well.”

Next year Pieters expects the project to grow by another 10-15 collection centres and see 100,000 gift boxes donated. She plans to continue to use SMS to drive gift drop offs by donors, but also incorporate it into her internal communications with her network of 70+ co-ordinators around the country. She plans to use SMS to co-ordinate training sessions, keep the co-ordinators apprised of internal issues – for instance the website often takes strain due to high traffic volumes when the call for donors is first opened – as well as communicate with them during the drop off period.

“Yet again SMS has proved its worth as a logistical tool. For last minute emergency communications to a group of people, when you need to be sure the message will be received, read immediately and acted upon, SMS is the only choice,” said Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com.



BulkSMS.com's application-to-person (A2P) messaging service is being used around the world for emergency notifications such as schools being closed for snow days or updates on the spread of diseases. The company also offers non-profit organisations, schools and faith-based organisations SMS messages at cost, to be used for non-commercial purposes. More information can be found at [www.community.bulkSMS.com](http://www.community.bulkSMS.com)