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Cleaning the phone numbers in your customer database before sending transactional SMS

WhatsApp & APIs

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Cleaning the phone numbers in your customer database before sending transactional SMS

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The short answer: before you connect your system to SMS, tidy up the phone numbers in your customer database: **one format**, no spaces or symbols, **no landlines**, **no duplicates**, and one main number per customer. The API takes numbers with or without the country code, because the system can tell the country from the first digit: **923456789** goes to Angola and **841234567** to Mozambique. So **+244 923 456 789** and **244923456789** are the same number as **923456789**. Even so, a clean database saves `invalid_number` errors, credits, and notices that end up with the wrong person.

What the API accepts

Number	What happens
A Mozambican or Angolan mobile, with or without the country code, with or without spaces	Recognised on its own and sent.
Any other number without a country code	Treated as being in your account's country.
A number in a country the service does not send to	The API answers `422` with `country_not_available`.
An incomplete number, or one with letters	The API answers `422` with `invalid_number`.
A number on your account's do-not-send list	The API answers `422` with `number_opted_out`.

Tidying the database, step by step

1. **Strip out everything that is not a digit**: spaces, dots, dashes, brackets and the + sign.

2. **Pick one format and store every number that way**, ideally with the country code. A number with its code leaves no doubt, wherever it came from.

3. **Separate landlines from mobiles.** A landline cannot receive SMS: keep it in another field, for calls.

4. **Merge duplicates.** The same customer with the number written three ways gets three texts.

5. **Mark one main number per customer**, so notices always go to the same one.

An example in Python

```
import re

def clean(number):
n = re.sub(r"\D", "", number or "")
if n.startswith("00"):
n = n[2:]
if len(n) == 9 and n[0] in "89":
return n
if len(n) == 12 and n[:3] in ("258", "244"):
return n
return None # for a person to review
```

The example accepts nine-digit mobiles, with or without the Mozambican or Angolan country code, and sets the rest aside for someone to review. Adapt it to your data: what matters is that no doubtful number reaches the API unseen.

Numbers change hands.
A former customer may have given up the number, and the next notice reaches someone else. Ask customers to keep their phone number up to date and, in any notice with personal data, keep it to the minimum: **what never to put in an SMS**.

For SMS Center contacts
, the CSV import takes lists from your database, and a number is never duplicated within the account. See **contacts and groups**.

RECOMMENDED

Clean data, the right notices: see how Transactional SMS works.

See Transactional SMS →

SEE ALSO

- SMS contacts and groups: importing a CSV list and keeping it clean →
- SMS API errors and message statuses: what each one means and what to do →
- What never to put in a transactional SMS: passwords, full card numbers and private details →
- SMS statistics and reports through the API: totals by status, credits spent and days →
- SMS good practices and consent: who you may send to and how to let people opt out →
- Test cases for transactional SMS in the Sandbox: wrong numbers, long texts, no credits, repeats →

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TAX ID (NIF)	500 260 5724
COMMERCIAL REGISTRATION NO.	26464-25/250724
REGISTERED OFFICE	Rua Direita do Patriota, Bairro Dangereux Belas, Luanda, Angola
CONTACT	info@interweb.ao · +244 942 011 191 · www.interweb.ao
OPENING HOURS	Monday to Friday - 08 AM to 04 PM Saturday & Sunday - Closed

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