SMS, MMS, and iMessage

SMS stands for short messaging service, but it is commonly referred to as text messaging. Text messages are a great way to quickly touch base with people without interrupting them with a voice call. Sometimes you can text people and receive a text reply when it would be impossible or difficult to do a voice call.

MMS is short for multimedia messaging service, which provides a quick, standard way to send pictures, video, voice memos, map locations, and contact cards.

iMessage is Apple’s new service that does exactly the same thing as SMS and MMS, but works over your data plan and only with other iOS 5 devices.

All of these services can be found in your iPhone’s Messages app. In this chapter, you will learn how to use these services to send a text message from your Contacts app and a picture message from your Photos app.

SMS/MMS vs. iMessage

With iOS 5, Apple has built the iMessage service right into same Messages app that has always handled SMS and MMS messages.

The advantage to iMessage is that it works over your existing data plan, so it doesn’t require an additional, potentially expensive text messaging plan. Nor does iMessage open you up to costly per-message charges if you don’t have a plan or you are travelling without a roaming plan.
The disadvantage to iMessage is that it only works with other iOS 5 devices, so you can’t use it with your friends or family who have non-Apple smartphones like BlackBerrys or regular feature phones.

SMS, MMS, and iMessage are all built into the same Messages app, so you don’t have to worry about which one you must use once you set it up. Your iPhone will automatically use iMessage whenever possible, but revert to SMS and MMS when iMessage isn’t available (e.g., when you’re texting someone who is not on an iOS 5 device).

**Does iMessage Count As Text or Data?**

iMessages are sent over your carrier’s data network, not its SMS channel, so these messages don’t count against your SMS/MMS plan (if you have a limited plan). Instead, they count against your data plan cap (if you have limited data).

If you’re sending the message to someone who’s not using an iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad on iOS 5, then your message is sent via SMS/MMS, and it counts against your texting plan.

**How Will Messages Send?**

You might have limited text messages and want to make sure you’re using the iMessage service as much as possible. Or, you might have limited data and want to make sure you’re sticking to SMS/MMS whenever you can. In either case, Apple makes it easy to tell which system you’ll be using:

- If iMessage is available, everything from the background of the contact name to the word bubbles containing the messages will be **blue**, and the text entry box will say “iMessage.”

- If iMessage is off or unavailable, everything from the background of the contact name to the word bubbles containing the messages will be **green**, and the text entry box will say “Text Message.”