Glossary of mobile terminology
American mobile adoption rates have reached a tipping point at 85%, which means businesses are examining their communication and payment strategies and performing research to match. Whether you’re already an expert in mobile, or are just starting out, we know that it’s helpful to have a cheat sheet for terms and acronyms. That’s why Western Union® has assembled a glossary of mobile terminology that you’re likely to encounter. That way, you’re free to focus on the solutions that you truly need – not just the definitions that you require.

**Glossary:**

**3G**  Short for “Third Generation.” 3G services typically include wide area wireless voice and broadband data access, high data speeds and always-on data access. According to the ITU (International Telecommunication Union), networks must be able to provide a mobile device with a downlink connection speed of 384 kbps in order to be considered a 3G technology.

**4G**  Short for “Fourth Generation.” A term used to describe mobile technologies with faster speeds than 3G, which will eventually replace current 3G networks. In 2009, the ITU specified requirements for 4G standards, setting speed requirements for 4G service at 100 mbps for high mobility communication (like from trains and cars) and 1 Gbps for low mobility communication (like pedestrians and stationary users). 4G networks are also known as LTE (Long Term Evolution) networks, depending on the mobile provider.

**Android**  A Linux-based smartphone operating system (OS) and software platform created by Google, introduced to market in 2008 and backed by the Open Handset Alliance, or OHA. Multiple manufacturers make phones that run Android including Samsung, LG and Google. As a software platform, Android allows apps (software) written for Android to run on all Android-based phones, regardless of manufacturer, and Android permits greater customization (by carriers and manufacturers) than most other platforms.

**Application (App)**  An abbreviated term for third-party software applications that are developed specifically for mobile devices and their associated operating systems (e.g., Apple iOS for iPhone, Google’s Android OS, etc.). These programs range in size, complexity and price, and serve to allow individual users to customize their smartphone to meet their wants and needs, while enjoying a standardized experience for everything from games to social utilities to shopping apps. These apps are downloaded from specific online marketplaces that cater to each operating system (i.e., Android Market, Apple’s App Store, BlackBerry App World, etc.)

**API (Application Programming Interface)**  A specific set of rules and commands that software developers can use to communicate and access specific pieces of functionality from the underlying operating system (OS) or hardware for a device – in this case, a mobile phone. Publishing APIs creates an open architecture for sharing content and data between communities and applications. For instance, a phone might have a specific API that allows a downloaded game to access the phone’s sound and vibration controls. Alternatively, APIs allow content that is created in one place to be dynamically posted and updated in multiple locations on the web.
Apple  A Cupertino-based company that designs and markets consumer electronics and software, including the iPhone, the iPad, and iOS.

BlackBerry  A line of wireless handheld devices and services designed and marketed by BlackBerry Limited, formerly known as Research In Motion Limited. BlackBerrys have a reputation for boasting strong email encryption features, making them popular for corporate and government use.

Bluetooth  A short-range radio technology that allows wireless communication between mobile devices, computers and other network devices.

Calling Plan  A package offered by wireless service providers that includes the activation, monthly charges, per-minute air time charges, roaming terms, local service area as well as additional services like voicemail, data and international roaming.

Capacitive Touchscreen  In the cell phone industry there are two major categories of touchscreen displays: capacitive touchscreens and resistive touchscreens. Capacitive touchscreen displays rely on the electrical properties of the human body to detect when and where on a display the user touching. Because of this, they usually can’t be used with a stylus or a gloved hand. The most common example of devices with capacitive touchscreens is the Apple iPhone and most Android-based phones.

Carrier / Service Provider / Operator  Carrier is a term commonly used in the United States and Canada to refer to a company that provides voice or data services. Wireless carriers are companies that operate wireless networks and sell the use of those networks. The network consists of antennas that are linked to towers and the infrastructure that links these two components. The service that carriers provide allows customers to access the network through their mobile device, under a variety of access plans.

CDMA (Code-Division Multiple Access)  CDMA is a digital wireless technology that is used in the US by Sprint, U.S. Cellular and Verizon Wireless. This technology competes with GSM, which is used by AT&T and T-Mobile.

Digital  The use of a binary data system to represent information.

Download / Downlink  A connection going FROM a network and/or server (such as a mobile phone network) TO an end-user device (such as a phone).

Droid  A brand used by Verizon Wireless for a subset of its phones that run the Android operating platform for smartphones.
**EDGE (Enhanced Data for Global Evolution)**  An enhancement for GSM/GPRS networks that increases the speed of data rates, based on existing GSM and GPRS technology.

**Feature Phone**  Any mobile phone that is not a smartphone. A feature phone typically provides voice calling and texting capabilities, and may allow some degree of web access, depending on the device.

**Form Factor**  The term used to describe the fundamental physical style in which a phone comes. The most common form factors are bar, clamshell, flip, swivel and slide. The form factor that a phone uses is typically driven by both functional and aesthetic considerations.

**Geo-Tagging**  The act of associating a geographic location with an item such as a photo or a Twitter entry.

**Gestures**  Borrowing from a universal aspect of communication, touch gestures allow users to interact with enabled devices (enabled devices feature touch-sensitive areas such as screens or sensors) by using universal hand movements. Certain touch gestures are now common among touch-screen smart devices and may include such motions as “tapping,” swiping, pinching open and close, flicking, dragging, and rotating. The use of such gestures varies by manufacturer but may perform tasks such as deleting, closing, opening, zooming in or out, moving items around on a screen, etc.

**GPS (Global Positioning System)**  A series of space-based global navigation satellites that are owned by the US government. These satellites broadcast signals that receivers on the surface of the planet can use to determine position through triangulation. The term GPS is often used to refer to a GPS receiver, such as those used in cars and sometimes found in mobile phones.

**GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication)**  GSM is one of two major mobile phone technologies available in the U.S., the other is CDMA. AT&T and T-Mobile use GSM, while Sprint and Verizon use CDMA. The most visible feature of GSM is the use of SIM cards, which are smart cards that identify the user on the network, and can also store information such as contacts.

**GSMA (GSM Association)**  A trade association of mobile carriers and related companies dedicated to supporting and standardizing the GSM system. The GSMA sponsors what is generally considered one of the world’s largest mobile conferences and is one of the most influential mobile organizations.

**iOS**  Known as iPhone OS before June of 2010, iOS is the mobile operating system that supports Apple devices like the iPhone, iPad and iTouch. iOS is a closed and proprietary system, and Apple does not license iOS for installation on third-party hardware.

**ITU (International Telecommunication Union)**  ITU refers to the United Nations’ specialized agency for information and communication technologies. The ITU is responsible for allocating global radio spectrum and satellite orbits and establishing the technical standards that ensure that wireless networks and technologies can seamlessly interconnect. It also works to improve technology infrastructure availability in the developing world.
Keyword  A unique word or number that is created for a specific short code campaign. The keyword is the actual text that a user keys in on their mobile phone in order to interact with a campaign (i.e. “Text VOTE to 12345 to vote for Sarah,” where VOTE is the keyword). Multiple keywords can be used on a single short code.

Location Based Services (LBS)  Location Based Services refers to a broad range of services that are based on information about the physical location of a user and their mobile device. This information is transmitted automatically, without requiring the user to input information like a ZIP code. Typical location-based services for consumers might include real-time turn-by-turn directions, or social networking services like Foursquare. Location-based services are also utilized as a way to more effectively market to consumers, by displaying customized content, including discounts and deals to subscribers, based on their current location.

Long SMS / Concatenated SMS  A feature that allows users to send and receive text messages (SMS) that are longer than the 128 or 160 character limit that is usually imposed. Long messages can be composed as one, and then they are automatically split up into smaller messages to send over the network. Maximum lengths vary, from about 300 characters to over 1,000, depending on the phone.

.mobi (or dotMobi)  .mobi is a top level domain (just like .com, .net, .org, etc.) used by mobile devices to access resources on the mobile web. dotMobi was backed and sponsored by mobile industry leaders like Google, Samsung, Nokia and the GSMA, and helps to set standards and best practices for mobile content. The practices are designed to enable good user experiences on mobile Web-enabled devices, and suggest several methods of implementing these practices. dotMobi does not mandate any particular technology, but does require that .mobi sites produce user experiences that are specifically optimized for mobile phones, consistent with their guidelines.

Mobile Marketing  A form of marketing that generally uses SMS, MMS or pushed websites to deliver a message to mobile phones or other mobile devices.

Mobile Commerce  The use laptops, cell phones or other wireless, handheld electronic devices to initiate or complete commercial transactions online.

Mobile Terminated (MT) Message  An SMS or MMS message that was sent (or “terminated”) to a mobile phone. The message may have originated from another mobile phone or from a web server, PC or other fixed device. These messages are typically viewed by the recipient in their text message ‘Inbox.’

Mobile User Experience (UX)  A term intended to encompass the general satisfaction – or perhaps lack of frustration – that a typical user will experience in the operation of a given data application or feature.

Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS)  A type of messaging that allows multimedia objects like images, audio and video to be sent via the wireless network to a mobile device. This is in contrast to the simple text enabled by Short Message Service (SMS) messages.
**NFC (Near Field Communication)** NFC is a technology standard for short-range contactless wireless connectivity that enables secure two-way interactions among electronic devices. NFC technology typically takes the form of a small chip in a phone, or a plastic card (like a credit card). The phone or card is simply placed on or very near a reader device (like a pad on a debit card terminal or a turnstile) to initiate a transaction. NFC can be used for financial transactions, as a replacement for swiping or inserting a plastic card. In this way it can function as a credit card, debit card, ID card, transit pass, or any type of stored-value card. It can also be used for authentication, such as an employee ID to grant entry to buildings.

**Internet of Things (IoT)** A scenario in which everyday objects have network connectivity and have the ability to automatically transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction.

**OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer)** A term commonly used in the mobile industry to refer to the company that designs and manufactures mobile phones. The OEM may use a proprietary or open source operating system, and the device that they create may or may not be network specific. Some examples of OEMs include Apple, Motorola, Samsung, RIM, HTC and Nokia.

**OHA (Open Handset Alliance)** The OHA is the group that manages the standards for the Android smartphone operating system. It was created by Google and includes members like China Mobile, HTC, Motorola, Sprint, and T-Mobile USA.

**Operating System** The “core” software that controls the basic operation of an electronic device and allows it to run other applications developed for that platform. Examples include Windows and Mac OS for PCs, and iOS and Android for mobile devices.

**Pay as You Go / PAYG** Usually used interchangeably with the term prepaid, meaning service that is paid in advance on an as-needed basis, instead of being billed at the end of each month (post-paid). Since service is paid for in advance, there is no generally no need for contracts or credit checks with pay-as-you-go arrangements. One difference from prepaid is that a PAYG plan can have the option to be set up to automatically deduct funds from a bank account when depleted, instead of the balance simply becoming zero, rendering the phone unusable until the account is manually replenished.

**Post-Paid** Post-paid customers are mobile subscribers who are billed for their use of a carrier’s services on a monthly basis, based on either the terms of a contract or on the amount of services they have used. Traditional post-paid service generally requires passing a credit check, and a monthly bill or invoice is issued to collect the amount due to the carrier. Most mobile customers use a post-paid arrangement, although not all post-paid customers are bound by contracts.
**Prepaid**  In the world of mobile phones, prepaid is an alternative to the traditional post-paid type of service plan. This arrangement is typically used as an option for credit-challenged customers, or customers who prefer to avoid the risk of overage charges. With prepaid, minutes must be purchased in advance and credited to a balance of minutes. When the balance of minutes runs out, no more calls can be made, preventing the customer from incurring a debt.

**Push Messaging / Notifications**  The delivery of information from a software application to a computing device without a specific request from the client.

**QR Code**  A QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response code) is a type of bar code designed to be read by smartphones. Users may perform such tasks as receive text, visit a website, add a contact to their device, or compose an email or text message after scanning a QR code.

**Resistive Touchscreen**  In the cell phone industry there are two major categories of touchscreen displays: capacitive touchscreens and resistive touchscreens. Resistive touchscreens are composed of multiple layers that are separated by thin spaces. Pressure applied to the surface of the display by a finger or stylus causes the layers to touch, which completes electrical circuits and tells the device where the user is touching.

**Responsive Web Design**  Also known as adaptive, fluid, flexible or liquid, these web designs are aimed at crafting sites to provide an optimal viewing experience.

**RFID Code (Radio Frequency Identification)**  A technology that uses electronic tags placed on objects, people, or animals to relay identifying information to an electronic reader by means of radio waves.

**Short Code or Common Short Code**  A short code is a special telephone number that is 5-6 characters in the US and is designed to be easier to read and remember than a typical phone number. Short codes act as addresses to which users can send SMS and MMS messages from mobile phones. In the US, some classes of numbers are inter-operator, or common short codes, which are controlled by the Common Short Code Administration. Short codes are widely used for value-added services such as interactive voting (like on American Idol and other reality shows), ordering ringtones, as well as other mobile services. Short codes are available in both custom and random form.

**SIM (Subscriber Identity Module)**  A SIM is a small chip or card used in GSM phones to store data that identifies the user to the carrier and allows information like contacts and mobile wallet balances to be saved with the device.

**Smartphone**  A device that combines cellular telephone functionality with computing power, usually in the form of a proprietary operating system, software or apps, web access and messaging capabilities. Larger displays, more powerful processors, touchscreens and full alphabet keyboards are also typical features.
SMS (Short Message Service)  SMS is a feature available with practically all modern mobile phones that allows users to send and receive short, unencrypted text messages. This two way communication protocol can be used for time-critical alerts, updates and reminders, mobile campaigns, content and entertainment applications, as well as to trigger an action or update on the receiver’s side. These transmissions travel over signaling paths that help control telephony traffic, and have a 160 character limit, in order to minimize bandwidth usage and fit into existing signaling formats.

MMS  MMS extends text messaging to include longer text, graphics, photos, audio clips, video clips, or any combination of the above, within certain size limits.

Tablet  A tablet (or tablet computer) is a complete mobile computer, larger than a smartphone, and primarily interfaced through a touchscreen. Most tablets access data through wireless Internet or mobile networks.

WAP (Wireless Application Protocol)  An open international standard for applications that use wireless communication. Its primary use application is to enable access to the Internet from a mobile phone. The cell phone network is most commonly used from phones (with 3G and 4G providing faster service) but short-range options such as Wi-Fi can be used as well, if the phone supports it.

WAP Website  An antiquated mobile web technology that allowed early users of the mobile web to access the Internet. WAP websites contained a unique programming language that early browsing software would interpret and display in common formats (lists, scores, weather forecasts, etc.). This technology has largely disappeared in the U.S. and Europe and has been replaced by smart devices that understand a more standard web programming language known as HTML.

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