ANYMESSAGE

RCS WHITEPAPER

RCS Business Messaging

The next evolution of A2P SMS, finally arriving in Europe — where penetration actually sits in 2026, what RCS Business Messaging can and cannot do, how it integrates with the SMS fallback beneath it, and the deployment patterns that produce results rather than disappointment.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

RCS in 2026 — the real picture, not the slideware

RCS Business Messaging has been "about to arrive" in Europe for nearly a decade. In 2024–2025 that changed. Handset support consolidated, operator support converged, iOS-side interoperability landed in enough markets to matter, and enterprise adoption moved from pilots to production in banking, retail and delivery logistics. The guide is an honest practitioner take on where the channel actually sits in 2026 — and what the deployment pattern looks like for EU enterprises ready to move beyond SMS-only.

Written for digital and channel leaders, product owners and compliance officers evaluating RCS investment in 2026. It covers the penetration map, the capability set, the SMS-fallback integration pattern that matters most, the vendor criteria specific to RCS, and where the channel is heading through 2027.

Contents

> **A note on vendor mentions.** This guide is produced by AnyMessage. Where AnyMessage is referenced, we identify the claim clearly. The frameworks presented are useful regardless of the vendor you select.

CHAPTER 01

RCS in 2026 — the state of play

Four observations on where RCS Business Messaging actually sits in Europe in 2026, drawn from enterprise deployments rather than vendor pitch decks.

H

Handset support is now practical

Android RCS support via Google Messages is the de-facto baseline across the EU. Android handset penetration is high enough in most major markets that RCS-first messaging addresses the majority of the active mobile base — and iOS-side interoperability continues to expand.

M

The market map is uneven

Germany, the UK, France and the Nordics show the strongest RCS enterprise uptake. Southern Europe lags but is catching up. RCS penetration is still well-short of SMS universality; deployments that assume "RCS-only" leave real audience uncovered.

O

Operator support has consolidated

The messy mid-decade period of fragmented operator RCS has resolved — most European operators either support the Google-hosted RCS stack or have converged their own implementations to interoperate. Enterprise deployment no longer requires per-operator integration gymnastics.

I

iOS interoperability is improving

iOS RCS interoperability has rolled out in phases through 2024–2025, with expanding capability coverage in 2026. Cross-platform RCS — messages that render richly on both Android and iOS — is now the realistic default, not a long-term aspiration.

THE HONEST TAKE

RCS is a real channel in 2026, not a roadmap item. It is also not a replacement for SMS — it is a rich-channel overlay that addresses the majority of the smartphone base with SMS covering the remainder. Deploy it accordingly.

CHAPTER 02

How RCS Business Messaging works

A technical walk-through of how RCS Business Messaging is actually delivered — the architecture, the sender-registration flow, and the distinction between Google-hosted and operator-hosted RCS that still matters in some markets.

The architecture in one picture

Enterprise application → messaging platform → RCS aggregator / RBM platform → destination operator → recipient handset. Inbound (read receipts, suggested-reply responses, two-way messages) returns along the same path. The critical integration point is between the messaging platform and the RBM/aggregator layer; beyond that, the path is operator-managed.

Google RBM vs operator-hosted RCS

In most European markets, RCS Business Messaging is delivered through Google's RCS Business Messaging (RBM) platform. A smaller set of operators runs their own RCS platforms; messaging platforms integrate with both and deliver through whichever reaches the destination. From the enterprise perspective, this is mostly transparent — authored templates render across both paths with minor formatting differences the platform normalises.

Sender registration — the prerequisite

Before any RCS traffic can be sent, the brand must be registered as a verified sender — brand name, logo, colour palette, contact information, category, and use-case declaration submitted to the RBM platform (or operator equivalent). Verification takes days to weeks depending on market and brand recognition, but once complete, sends through this sender carry the brand identity in the recipient's inbox. This is part of the channel's value proposition; it is also operational overhead enterprises should plan for.

Template approval and categorisation

Like WhatsApp, RCS requires templates for most transactional messaging. Templates are categorised — transactional, authentication, marketing — with different rules per category. Approval is typically fast but not instant; production deployments build template approval into the content publication workflow rather than treating it as a one-off.

Delivery receipts and analytics

RCS provides richer delivery signals than SMS — delivered, read, and where the recipient interacted (clicked a suggested reply, opened a rich card). Analytics integration opens up real measurement of engagement that SMS cannot match. It also introduces privacy considerations enterprises should address in their DPIAs.

CHAPTER 03

The capability set

Four RCS capabilities that are real and useful in 2026 — and two that the specs claim but that mostly disappoint in actual deployment.

1 · Rich media — cards, carousels, images

RCS delivers image, video and structured card payloads in the messaging inbox. For product showcase, delivery tracking with map, itinerary display and confirmation-with-receipt patterns, the rendered experience is substantially richer than SMS. Not as full-featured as native app or mobile web, but delivered without app install. This is the single strongest capability argument for RCS.

2 · Suggested replies and actions

Messages can include suggested-reply buttons ("Confirm", "Reschedule", "Contact support") and suggested-action buttons (call, open URL, open map). These produce real engagement uplift on service-interaction flows — recipients complete the intended action more reliably than with free-text response or plain URL.

3 · Verified sender and branded identity

The verified-sender programme delivers the sender's brand — name, logo, verified checkmark — in the recipient's inbox. Measurable trust uplift compared to SMS from an unbranded short-code, particularly material in financial services, insurance and healthcare communications where recipient confidence in sender identity matters.

4 · Read receipts

Where the recipient has read-receipts enabled (per their OS settings), RCS delivers read receipts. For transactional flows where "did they see it" affects downstream behaviour — fraud alerts, outage notifications, delivery confirmations — this is operationally useful. The signal is not universal (some recipients disable read receipts) but where present it is reliable.

What disappoints in practice

- **Chatbot-style conversational flows** rendered in the messaging inbox work less well than the specs suggest — free-form conversation in a messaging thread loses context faster than in dedicated chat UIs. Structured service flows (narrow, bounded) perform well; open-ended conversation underperforms.
- **Typing indicators and live presence** are specified but inconsistent across operator implementations; production deployments should not rely on them for correctness.

> **What this means for deployment planning.** The four capabilities that work are enough to justify the RCS investment for most EU enterprises — rich media and suggested replies alone deliver measurable engagement uplift. Do not plan roadmap on the specs that disappoint.

CHAPTER 04

RCS + SMS fallback

The deployment pattern that defines successful RCS programmes in 2026 — treating SMS as the deterministic fallback layer beneath RCS, with a unified template rendered per channel capability.

The pattern

Author message content once, in a template that contains both a rich RCS version (card, suggested replies, media) and a concise SMS fallback version. The platform resolves per-recipient: if the recipient supports RCS and the session is active, deliver the RCS version; otherwise, fall back to SMS automatically. Authoring is single-template; rendering is per-capability.

Why "SMS as deterministic layer" matters

RCS capability varies per-recipient. RCS delivery is not universal; handsets without support, recipients on unsupported operators, or session-state limitations mean some portion of an audience will never receive the RCS variant. SMS covers them. The design principle is: the RCS layer delivers the best experience where possible; the SMS layer guarantees reach. Both layers are necessary; neither alone is sufficient.

Template design — content discipline

- The SMS fallback must carry the core content (the information the recipient actually needs) not just a "see the app" link.
- The RCS version adds richness (media, buttons) without changing the core message.
- For OTP and time-critical messages, favour SMS-first delivery — the rich rendering is less important than the deterministic speed.
- For branded transactional content (delivery updates, appointment reminders, receipts), favour RCS-first with SMS fallback.

What a good platform implements

Capability resolution per-recipient (without the application having to detect it), fallback execution as a platform primitive, consistent DLR semantics across both layers, and a single audit record that captures what was actually delivered (RCS or SMS) for each message. If the application code has to manage the RCS/SMS decision, the platform is not doing its job.

> **THE ONE-TEMPLATE DISCIPLINE**
>
> Author once, render per capability. One canonical template object, RCS and SMS variants defined together, platform chooses at send time. Programmes that maintain two separate content workflows — one for RCS, one for SMS — accumulate inconsistency debt that eats the channel's value proposition.

CHAPTER 05

Buying & deploying RCS

The vendor-selection criteria that matter specifically for RCS, a pragmatic deployment blueprint, and the compliance frame for an RCS-enabled messaging programme.

RCS-specific vendor criteria

1 · RBM + operator coverage

Integration with Google RBM and operator-hosted RCS in your target markets, with the coverage disclosed per-country.

2 · Verified-sender support

Vendor manages brand-registration process, handles renewals, supports multi-brand structures where needed.

3 · Unified template platform

Author-once-render-per-capability, platform-managed SMS fallback, consistent DLR across layers.

4 · EU compliance posture

EU-only processing, DPA covering Google as sub-processor where RBM is used, clear consent architecture for the richer RCS data flows.

5 · Engagement analytics

Read-receipt aggregation, suggested-reply conversion tracking, per-template engagement reporting — with opt-out respect.

6 · Production-grade SLA

Uptime SLA covering RCS plus SMS fallback; documented incident response when RBM or operator RCS experiences issues.

A pragmatic deployment blueprint

- **Weeks 1–2.** Use-case prioritisation — which flows benefit most from RCS (branded transactional, service interactions); scope brand-registration work.
- **Weeks 3–6.** Brand registration submitted; first template design; SMS fallback variants defined.
- **Weeks 7–10.** Approved templates; PoC on one use case with RCS capability resolution and SMS fallback; engagement baseline captured.
- **Weeks 11–12.** Phased production rollout; monitoring; expansion to further use cases on proven template.

The compliance frame

RCS Business Messaging falls under GDPR and ePrivacy in the EU. Where RBM is used, Google is a processor — the DPA must reflect this. Verified-sender registration creates an attested brand relationship visible to the recipient; the trust elevation comes with corresponding expectation that content aligns with the verified identity. DPIAs should cover the richer data flows RCS introduces (read receipts, suggested-reply interactions).

CHAPTER 06

The road ahead

Four directions where RCS Business Messaging is heading through 2027 — and why the deployment decisions made in 2026 should anticipate them.

1 · iOS interoperability matures

iOS-side RCS interoperability will continue to expand capability through 2026–2027. The practical effect for EU enterprises: cross-platform RCS becomes the realistic default for rich transactional messaging, with the remaining iOS-side capability gaps narrowing but not fully closing. Plan templates to degrade gracefully where a capability is not yet supported.

2 · AI-enhanced RCS — but bounded

Conversational AI on RCS is plausible for narrow, well-bounded service flows (see the AI in Enterprise Communication guide). Open-ended chatbot conversations remain a weaker fit than specs suggest. Expect mature deployments to use AI on the operational side (content screening, anomaly detection, route quality) while keeping conversational AI narrow and human-escalation-ready.

3 · Verified-sender ecosystem tightens

GSMA trust-framework activity and verified-sender registration programmes will carry more weight through 2027. Unverified senders will see progressively worse deliverability; verified senders will see measurable engagement uplift. The brand-registration investment pays back in trust, deliverability and compliance posture simultaneously.

4 · Enterprise adoption catches up to consumer

Consumer-side RCS usage has been ahead of enterprise adoption for years. Enterprise production deployment is now catching up — banking, logistics, retail and public sector are all moving from pilots to production. Expect 2026–2027 to be the period where enterprise RCS volume meaningfully begins rivalling A2P SMS in supported markets, without displacing SMS in the fallback layer.

> **IMPLICATIONS FOR 2026 DECISIONS**
>
> Deployments begun in 2026 should assume an RCS-first-SMS-fallback architecture, full verified-sender registration, DPA covering Google as processor where relevant, and a template architecture that tolerates capability evolution without wholesale rewrite. None of this is speculative; it is the trajectory already underway.

> *"RCS finally arrived in Europe in 2024–2025. What enterprises do with it through 2027 depends less on the capability of the channel and more on the discipline of deployment — verified-sender registration, template architecture, SMS-fallback integration, compliance posture. The channel is ready; the operating model is the variable."*

— ANYMESSAGE CHANNEL ENGINEERING TEAM, 2026

Where AnyMessage fits in RCS deployment. Our platform integrates RCS Business Messaging with unified template authoring, platform-resolved SMS fallback, verified-sender registration management, and EU compliance posture — hosted in German data centres under ISO 9001 / 27001 compliance. Equivalent capability exists at other EU-first platforms. The frameworks in this guide apply regardless of vendor choice.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

AnyMessage GmbH

AnyMessage is a German cloud communications provider headquartered in Lübeck. The AnyMessage Gateway (AMG) delivers SMS, RCS, WhatsApp Business, Voice, Email and Video through a single API, hosted entirely in German data centres and operating in line with ISO 9001 and ISO 27001. We serve enterprise clients in banking, insurance, healthcare, public sector, regulated retail and tourism, together with aggregator and carrier partners across the EU.

Since 2024 AnyMessage and *interactive digital media GmbH (IDM)* have operated as a group under United Capital ownership — AnyMessage focused on EU and DACH compliance-sensitive enterprise deployments, IDM focused on global carrier connectivity via one of approximately 40 GSMA Open Connectivity certified hubs. Together the group combines a strong European compliance posture with international reach.

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CHANNELS · ONE API
SMS, RCS, WhatsApp, Voice, Email, Video

Who we serve

Enterprises across banking, insurance, healthcare, public sector, regulated retail and tourism — organisations for whom GDPR compliance, data residency and auditability are not negotiable. Carrier and aggregator partners across the EU complete our customer base. Specific references available on request under NDA.

TALK TO US

If this guide raised questions about RCS deployment for your specific use cases, verified-sender registration, or compliance posture for rich messaging, we are happy to have the conversation. Enterprise enquiries: contact@anymessage.cloud. Or call +49 (2173) 26505-0.

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Let's start the conversation

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