



INTERCOM

---

*Emoji Trends  
in Business Messaging  
2015-2016*

---



# Introduction

Humans are the most social species. In all aspects of our lives we yearn to connect with other people.

How we connect though, has fundamentally changed since the invention of the internet. Before the internet, most real-time communication was done face to face. Naturally this limited who you talked to. The internet has allowed us to connect with people in almost unlimited ways; no matter where someone is, or what they are doing, the internet can connect us. Much communication is now facilitated by a technology, like email, Facebook, or WhatsApp.

Despite impressive advances in *how* we can connect over the internet, some things have been lost in translation. When people communicate face to face, the majority of what is communicated isn't in the words we use; it's through non-text based expressions like body language, gestures, tone of voice, or indeed, touch. But historically our technologies have been text-based, and text is terrible at communicating the richness we have when communicating face to face.

Features like emoji emerged in consumer technologies to help people communicate things that matter, but that were too hard with text alone. Emoji usage has exploded around the world. This is as important in business communication as it is in personal communication. When people in a business talk to their customers or colleagues, they need the richness then as much as when talking with their friends and family.

In our first data report, we look at emoji trends abstracted from millions of conversations between software companies and their customers. Happy reading. 🧐

Paul Adams, VP of Product, Intercom

# Key Findings

## **1. Emoji use in business messaging quadrupled in 2016.**

The volume of messages containing at least one emoji quadrupled between the same 3-month period in 2015 and 2016. (12% in 2016 vs. just 3% of messages in 2015)

## **2. Consumers are 4X more likely to respond to a message containing emoji.**

Reply rates for messages from businesses containing at least one emoji were four times higher than those without.

## **3. Consumers are far more personal and expressive than businesses.**

Consumers used 30% more face emoji in their messages compared to businesses (83% vs. 51% in 2016).

Meanwhile the list of top emoji used by businesses were dominated by objects, like money symbols and gold stars.

## **4. Conversations were more positive this year.**

Notably, the Grinning Face emoji 😊 went from the bottom of the top 20 list in 2015 to number one in 2016, displacing Party Popper 🎉.

## **5. We found more heterogeneity in emoji used this year.**

The top 20 emoji used in business messages accounts for ~58% of all emoji usage in 2016, compared to ~90% in 2015.

The first skin tone variation of an emoji emerged in the consumer's top 20 list in 2016.

# *Methodology*

Intercom makes messaging apps for businesses to communicate with their potential and existing customers. To explore how emojis are being used in business messaging, we analyzed a sample of two million anonymized conversations that took place between our customers (“businesses”) and their end users (“consumers”) – one million random conversations from a 3-month period (June-Aug) in 2015 and one million random conversations from the same period in 2016. This data set includes initial messages and all replies to those messages. Conversations could be initiated by businesses as well as consumers.



# Detailed Analysis & Results

## 1. Emoji use in business messaging quadrupled in 2016.

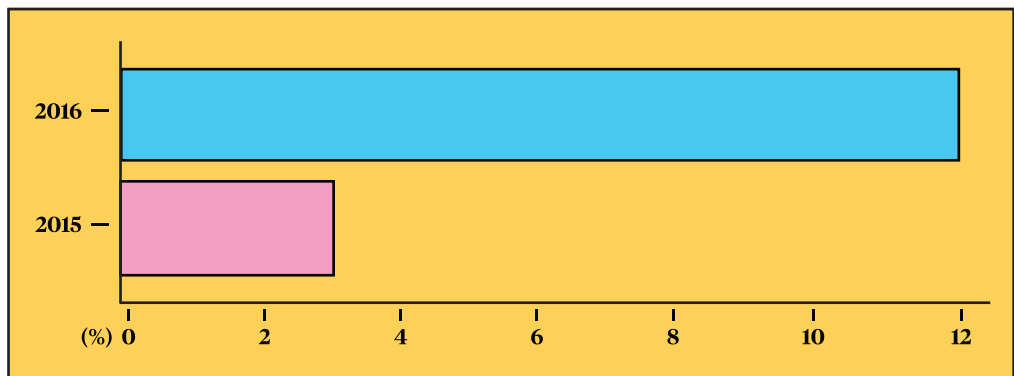
Table 1 below shows high-level findings of emoji use across all business messaging conversations. Roughly 150,000 messages from our sample set sent by a consumer or business contained at least one emoji, compared to roughly 30,000 during the same period in 2015. This shows that over the past year the number of business messages that included emojis increased by 4x [Chart 1].

Meanwhile the use of more than one emoji in a message increased: in 2015 only 1% of messages contained multiple emoji, in 2016 this shot up to 5%.

Table 1: Summary of emoji trends in business messaging, 2015-2016

	2015	2016
Number of conversations in data set	1,000,000	1,000,000
Number of messages in data set	1,134,060	1,244,278
Total number of messages with at least 1 emoji	31,051 (3%)	147,802 (12%)
Total number of messages with more than 1 emoji	13,447 (1%)	63,579 (5%)
Total number of emoji occurrences across all messages	49,971	299,618
Total number of unique emojis (out of 1604 emojis from Unicode 8.0) found across all messages	220	582

Chart 1: Volume of business messages with emoji, 2015-2016



## 2. Conversations through a messaging interface were more positive this year.

Table 2 shows that in 2015, the three most common emoji used between businesses and consumers were: 1) Party Popper 🎉 2) Smiling Face With Sunglasses 😎 and 3) Multiple Musical Notes 🎵. Combined, these three emoji accounted for nearly half (45.4%) of all emoji used [Chart 2]. These are positive, if not terribly expressive, emoji. Meanwhile two emojis in the top 20 list contained a negative sentiment, the Weary Face 😞 and the Speak No Evil Monkey 🙊, aka “my lips are sealed.” We also find two relationship-related emojis in the top 20 list --- 👨👨 Two Men Holding Hands and 👩👩 Two Women Holding hands.

In 2016 [Table 2], the top 20 emojis bear some resemblance to 2015. We still find monetary emojis like 💵, 💰 and 💲 and love emojis in the form of 😍❤️💙. However, we see more types of hand gestures 🙌👊👉 emerge this year, supporting our belief that people crave richer forms of communication than text alone cannot perform. As in real life, hand gesture emojis are faster, easier, more expressive ways to communicate.

Another key difference is that the Grinning Face emoji 😊 went from #20 in 2015 to #1 this year and now accounts for ~15% of all emoji used, roughly 2x the second most popular emoji, Smiling Face With Smiling Eyes 😄 (~8% of all emoji used). This came as a pleasant surprise; often when consumers contact a business it's to resolve an issue, so we expected to see more emoji of unhappy sentiment. We infer a couple things: 1) this classic smiley face – ubiquitous in consumer messaging – has become more acceptable now in a business context and 2) our conversations are overall more positive.



Table 2: Top 20 emoji in 2015 and 2016 business messaging data sets









































2015			2016		
Emoji	# Freq	% Perc	Emoji	# Freq	% Perc
	8239	16.5		44069	14.7
	8152	16.3		22707	7.6
	6313	12.6		12586	4.2
	4411	8.8		9464	3.2
	3082	6.2		8421	2.8
	1886	3.8		6506	2.2
	1567	3.1		6362	2.1
	1376	2.8		6192	2.1
	1281	2.6		6183	2.1
	958	1.9		6068	2.0
	958	1.9		6058	2.0
	855	1.7		5488	1.8
	829	1.7		5153	1.7
	774	1.5		4789	1.6
	750	1.5		4651	1.6
	747	1.5		4562	1.5
	697	1.4		3979	1.3
	665	1.3		3546	1.2
	626	1.3		3417	1.1
	521	1.0		3371	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,971</b>	<b>89.4%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>173,572</b>	<b>57.9%</b>

Chart 2: Top 20 emoji used in business messaging (2015)

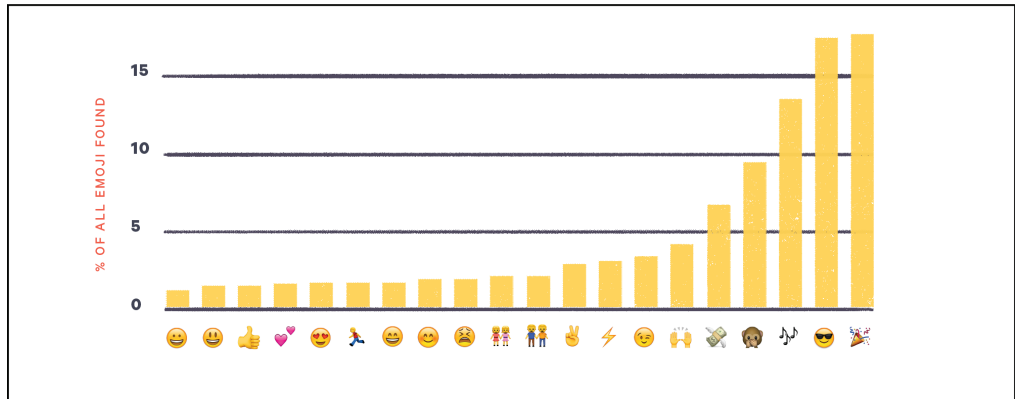
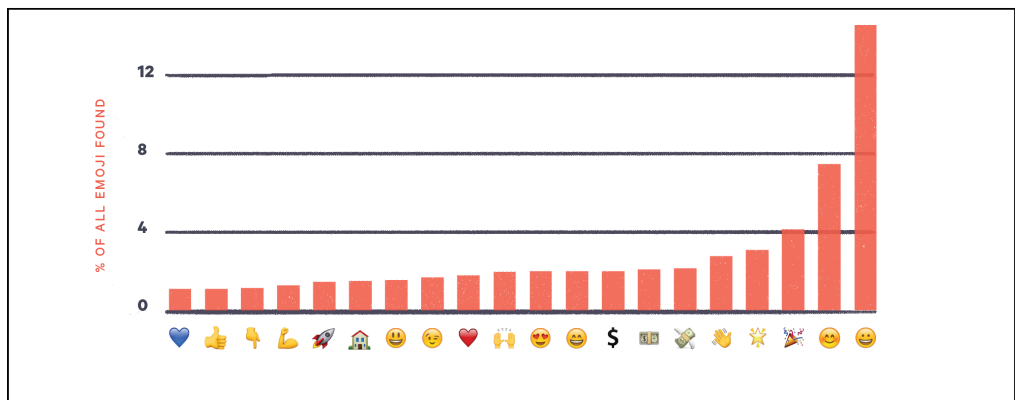


Chart 3: Top 20 emoji used in business messaging (2016)



### 3. Consumers are 4x more likely to respond to business messages that contain an emoji.

It's easy to dismiss emoji as being fun and games, but can be valuable and highly effective for businesses trying to engage consumers. We compared reply rates of business messages with and without emoji, and found that those with an emoji are four times more likely to elicit a response from a consumer. If your job is to engage sales-weary leads, emoji might help present you in a friendlier, less aggressive way that provokes a response.



#### 4. Consumers use more expressive, personal emoji than businesses do.

While early data is promising, businesses still have a ways to go before using emoji effectively.

Things get interesting when you dig deeper into the most common emoji used. We wondered if the top 20 emoji used by businesses mirrored those used by consumers. In traditional communication, we subconsciously mirror the other person when there's a true connection. When we're engaged in a conversation, our body language, facial expressions, voice and tone, even breathing patterns, start to resemble each other. Mirroring indicates both parties are listening, understanding, empathizing, and building rapport.

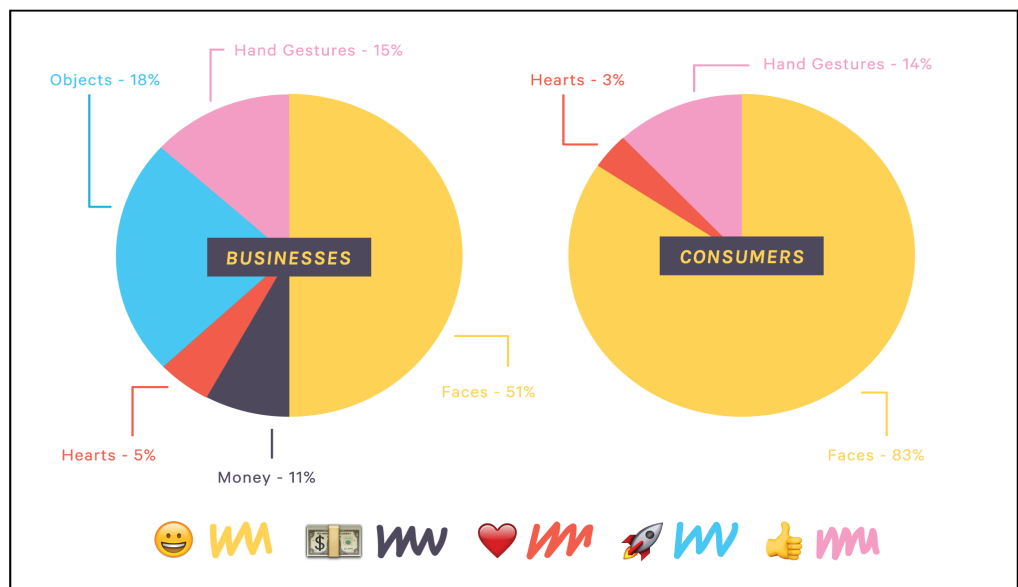
Table 3 lists the top 20 emoji used by businesses vs. consumers in 2016:

Businesses			Consumers		
Emoji	# Freq	% Perc	Emoji	# Freq	% Perc
😊	43716	14.7	😊	353	22.1
😄	22555	7.6	😄	152	9.5
🎉	12582	4.2	👍	117	7.3
🌟	9460	3.2	😡	96	6.0
👏	8420	2.8	😭	54	3.4
🔧	6506	2.2	😞	50	3.1
💰	6362	2.1	😞	32	2.0
💵	6192	2.1	😭	31	1.9
😄	6133	2.1	😞	29	1.8
😍	6047	2.0	😭	27	1.7
👊	6039	2.0	😞	26	1.6
❤️	5467	1.8	😊	25	1.6
😞	5121	1.7	😞	24	1.5
😊	4764	1.6	❤️	21	1.3
🏠	4651	1.6	👍	21	1.3
🚀	4561	1.5	👉	17	1.1
💪	3973	1.3	💔	17	1.1
👉	3546	1.2	😭	16	1.0
💙	3370	1.1	😞	16	1.0
👍	3300	1.1	😭	15	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>172,765</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>71.3%</b>

The top 20 consumer list [Table 3] includes face emojis (some happy 😊 😄, some unhappy 😞 😡), hearts (some in love ❤️, some broken hearted 💔) and hand gestures like 👍 👉. There are no other emoji types in the consumer list, i.e. no objects, no monetary emojis, etc., like we saw in the business list. We also found our first racial diversity reference in the top 20 user list (Thumbs Up With Pale Skin 👍🏻 alongside the generic yellow skin), reflecting a consumer app trend seen in emoji variants in recent years.

The most interesting difference is that in the top 20 list for consumers [Chart 4], the emoji are mostly faces. They're emotive, human, and expressive. For businesses, it's all about, well, business.

Chart 4: Top 20 emoji used by businesses and consumers, by category (2016)



**5. Businesses and consumers used a more varied set of emoji this year compared to last.**

Businesses and consumers are also using a more varied set of emoji in their messages in 2016 [Table 1]. Out of 1604 emojis analyzed from Unicode 8.0, 582 were exchanged at least once in 2016 compared to just 220 in 2015. There's also less homogeneity in the emojis used; the top 20 emoji account for ~58% of all emojis in 2016, compared to ~90% in 2015. We also found the first skin tone variation of an emoji in the consumer's top 20 list in 2016.

# Conclusion

The allure of messaging is that it's instant, certain, alive, emotive, expressive; it's the most personal and scalable form of communication that exists today. In some studies, messaging has already surpassed email and phone as the preferred way for consumers to contact businesses with questions or issues.

Emojis add to the incredible richness of communication that messaging provides. From this initial data report, we believe there are two things all businesses should look out for:

**1. To make the most of messaging, businesses need to reflect a wider range of emotion, gestures, and thought.** Often, businesses are slower to adopt new technology because it doesn't conform to their norms. When talking to a customer online, they might not feel comfortable using a smiley face emoji. Yet when in the same context in real life, they would of course smile. This is changing, not only with emoji usage increasing, but with businesses using more and more unique emoji representing a range of human emotion.

**2. Businesses that allow themselves to express their emotions as they do in real life will build better relationships with their customers.** The richest, most personal form of communication remains face to face. It's always easier to communicate, sell or resolve things in person. But if we extract this to a business communication context, businesses who appropriately adapt emoji use will succeed. Emoji isn't a fad, it's a way of adding expression and personality.

# *Authors*

Karen Church, Senior Manager Product Analytics at Intercom.

Sara Yin, Content Marketing Manager at Intercom.

A special thanks to Kelly Carpenter for the beautifully designed charts and graphics.

