How to set-up Ushahidi and FrontlineSMS for use together

Produced by FrontlineSMS and Ushahidi
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FRONTLINESMS AND USHAHIDI

Introduction

FrontlineSMS and Ushahidi are both free and open source software tools, widely used by social change projects the world over. FrontlineSMS is used to enable users to send, receive and manage large numbers of incoming and outgoing SMS. Ushahidi is a platform for information collection, visualization and mapping. Used together these tools can produce powerful results, with FrontlineSMS being used as a tool which can manage incoming SMS data which can then be visually represented using Ushahidi.

Examples of FrontlineSMS and Ushahidi being used together

FrontlineSMS and Ushahidi have been used together in many powerful and inspiring ways, including to monitor elections in Nigeria; to map harassment on the streets of Egypt; to track incidences of violence against children in Benin; to demonstrate and challenge incidences of human rights abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and these are just a few examples. Both Ushahidi and FrontlineSMS hear from new users regularly who are keen to use their software together, and this resource is intended to make that process as easy as possible.

Technology needed

- FrontlineSMS software (download)
- Compatible USB modem to use with FrontlineSMS (list available here)
- Ushahidi software: Select either Ushahidi Platform (server-based) or Crowdmap (Cloud-based)
- Any phone that can send and receive SMS
- Internet connection

Follow these step-by-step instructions to configure FrontlineSMS and Ushahidi
Approximate time required to configure: 20-30 minutes

Step One

To get started download and install [FrontlineSMS](#), and either download the [Ushahidi platform](#) or create a [Crowdmap](#).
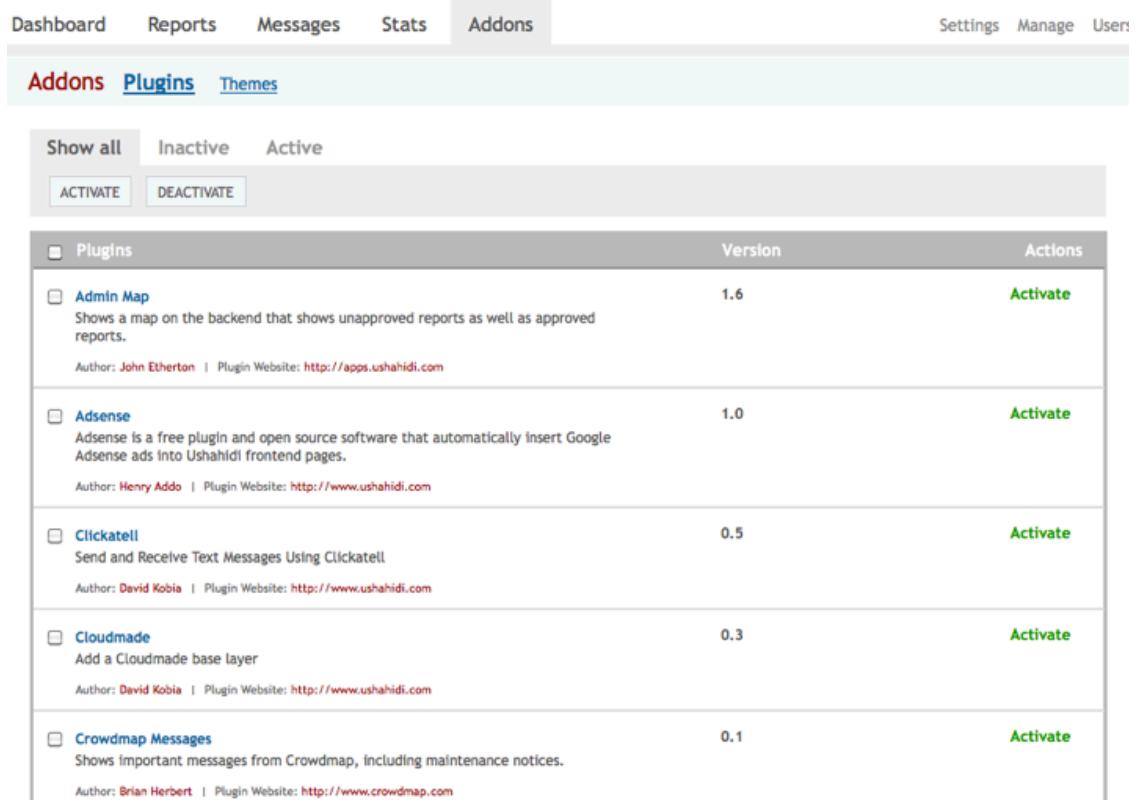
Once you have [downloaded](#) FrontlineSMS you will need to connect FrontlineSMS to a compatible device. We recommend a USB modem device, and you can find a list of compatible devices [here](#). Open the program, and set it up with your modem according to [these instructions](#). Check that the software is able to connect to the phone or modem you are using. Test whether it is working by sending and receiving a couple of text messages from your FrontlineSMS software.

If you have any problems with getting started on FrontlineSMS read through the resources available on the [user resources](#) section of the FrontlineSMS website, particularly the FrontlineSMS [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

For help with insalling the Ushahidi platform, see the [Ushahidi guides](#), [Ushahidi wiki](#) and [Ushahidi forums](#). This Crowdmap [video tutorial](#) will assist you with the steps to get started. To ensure your Ushahidi or Crowdmap deployment is working, you should file a report via the web form.

Step Two

In the add-ons tab of your Ushahidi or Crowdmap installation, click on 'show all' and navigate to the 'FrontlineSMS plugin'. Click on 'activate', and then on the 'settings' link next to the title.

This takes you to a summary of related actions. If you're using Ushahidi, you'll need to use the Ushahidi Sync Key, below. Copy and Paste this and the FrontlineSMS HTTP Post link into a text file.

For example, your Ushahidi Sync Key: TWKJHBID

Your FrontlineSMS HTTP Post link: http://beta1-1usahididdev.com/frontlinesms/?key=TWKJHBID&s=${sender_number}&m=${message_content}

Please note: In FrontlineSMS Version 1, you are not able to copy and paste text in a Mac, so you will need to enter the above manually.
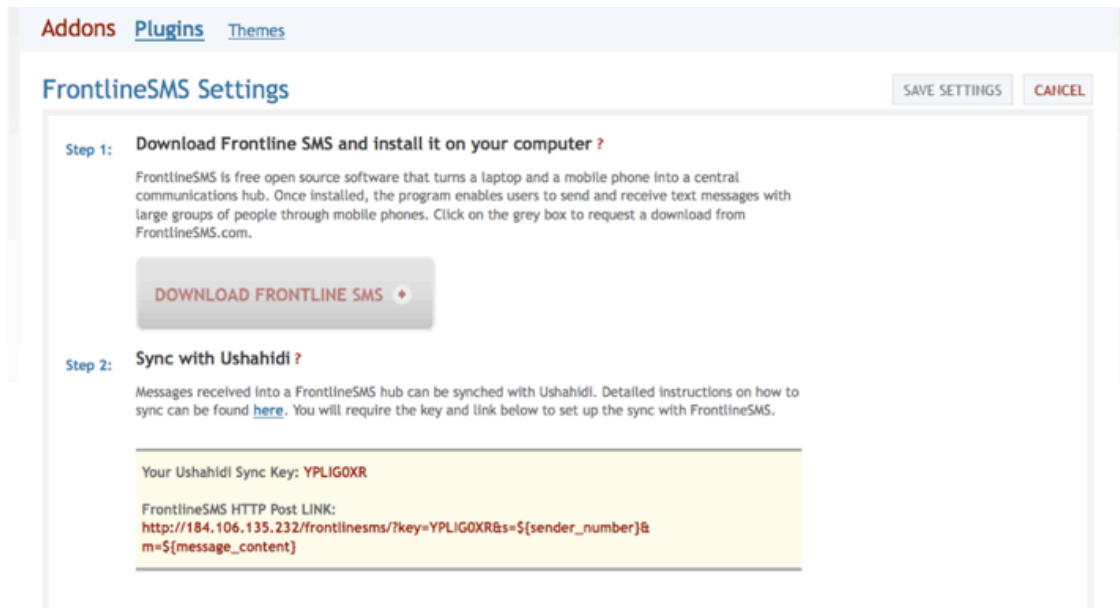

Step Three

In the settings section at the top right of the dashboard, navigate to the SMS tab. Under 'default sending provider', set the option to 'FrontlineSMS'. Enter the phone numbers that are connected to your FrontlineSMS instance, then save settings.
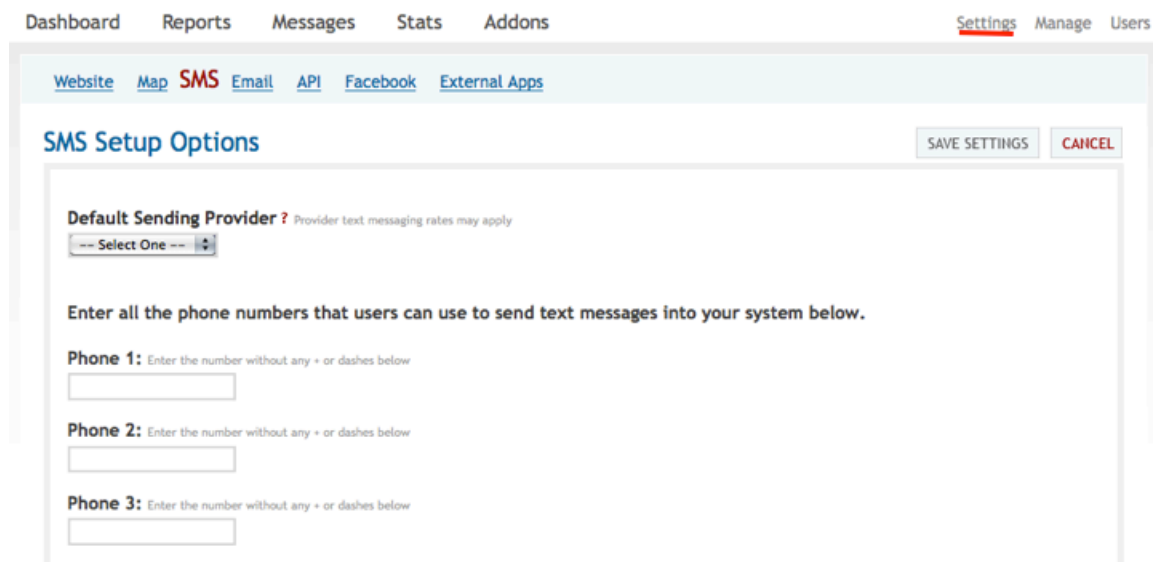
Step Four

In FrontlineSMS, open the Keywords tab, select the "<BLANK>" keyword in the
list on the left (versions1.5 and earlier) or the "<NONE>" keyword (versions 1.6.16.3 or earlier).

Next, click on the "click here to go to advanced view" link on the right below the "Keyword Actions"
section. At the bottom of the screen, click on "Auto Reply" and in the menu that pops up select the
"External Command" option.
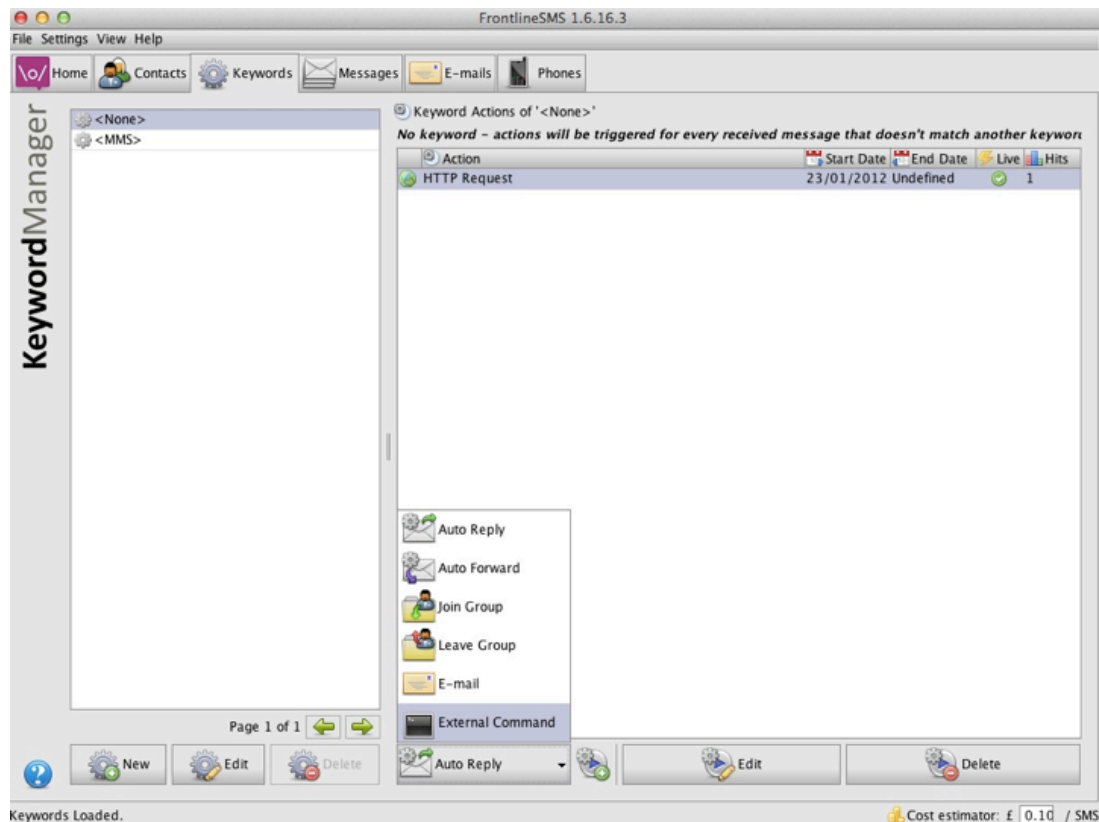
Step Five

In the window that opens, select "HTTP Request" as the execution type, paste the URL you copied
from your Ushahidi deployment above into the command text field that is in the "Execution Details"
section and select the "Do Not Wait For Response" button. Leave all the other fields untouched.

Then click "Done" and the process should be complete. Any SMS messages sent to FrontlineSMS will
also be forwarded to the admin page of your Ushahidi platform.
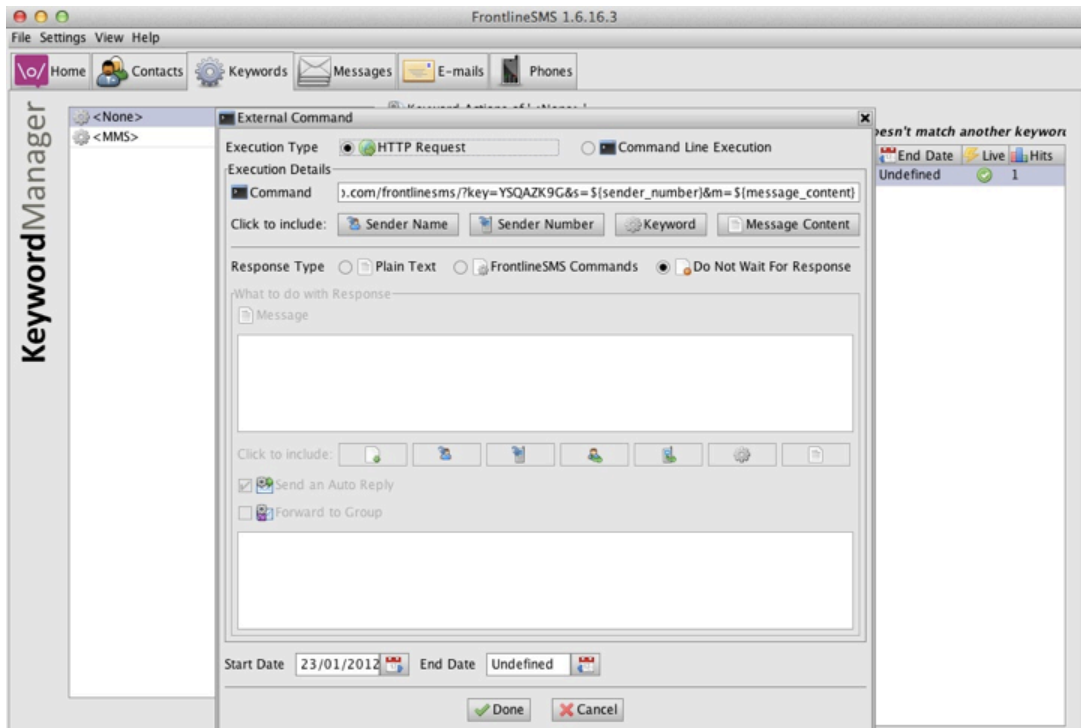
Step Six

Test Ushahidi and FrontlineSMS working together: send an SMS to FrontlineSMS while the keyword action is set up.

You should see the message come into FrontlineSMS on the 'latest events' box on the Home tab, and then a 'hit' register on the far right column of the keyword action box in the Keywords tab. A report should then appear in your Ushahidi or Crowdmap installation.
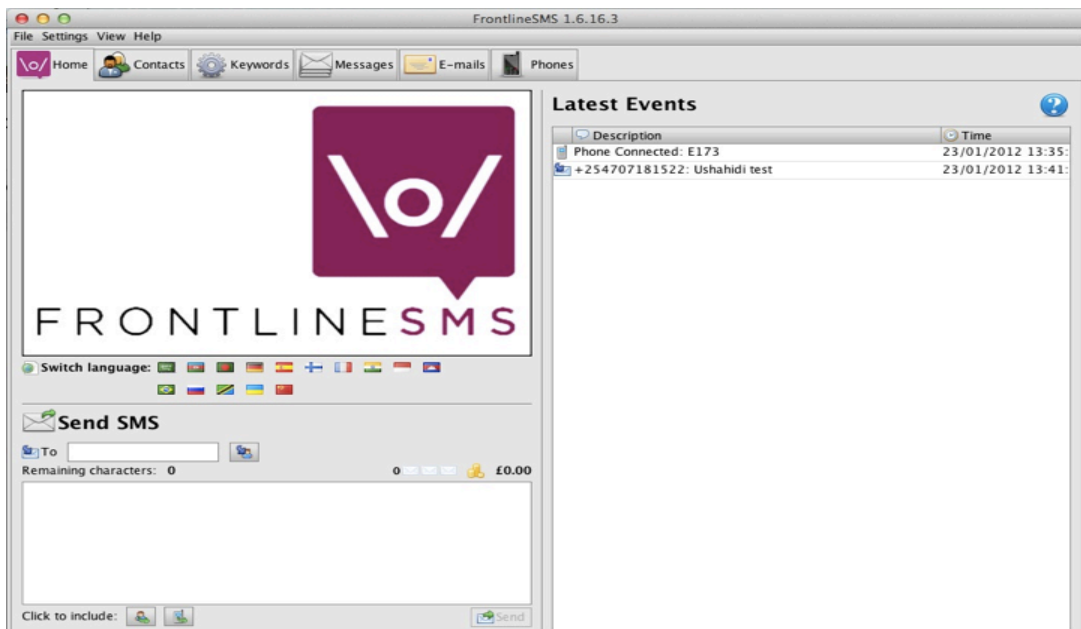
Tips and Tricks

Here are a few pointers to help you with the process:

- FrontlineSMS will not retry the HTTP Request if it fails for whatever reason. This means that any SMS messages that come into FrontlineSMS while your Internet connection is down will not be automatically forwarded to your Ushahidi deployment. To pause your receiving device, double click on it in the 'phones' tab and uncheck 'use to receive SMS'. When the Internet is restored, check this box again and SMS will start to come through again.
- Remember that your phone may freeze occasionally or the connection to the receiving device may be lost, so you need to keep an eye out for this. If this happens you can [fix it](#) by quitting FrontlineSMS and disconnect and reconnect the receiving device.

More Help

We hope that this was useful for you. If you have run through these steps and need further support OR if you would like to add best practice tips to our guide and help other users with this process please visit:

- [Ushahidi forums](#)and / or [community](#)
- [FrontlineSMS community forum](#)
- [Ushahidi wiki](#)