Mass Notification System Brings Streamlined Security to the Boston University Community

Boston University turned to Send Word Now for a real-time, multi-modal Emergency Mass Notification System (EMNS) as an integral part of a comprehensive communications plan across its dispersed campus.

**Challenge**

Boston University is composed of 134 acres set within the city of Boston, and an annual enrollment of 33,000 students. The university was seeking a new mass notification system that could be incorporated into its existing infrastructure and support the ability to deliver notifications and alerts to 46,000 students, faculty and administration, and other campus employees quickly and efficiently.

When Stephen Morash came to Boston University as Director of Emergency Management in 2005, command center communications involved a telephone tree. “I’d call two people; they’d each call two people, and so on.”

Not surprisingly, his first task upon arrival was to overhaul that outdated system. The University selected Send Word Now from OnSolve, an award-winning alerting and collaboration solution that allows campuses to integrate the industry’s most powerful communication platform into their own communication strategies. This enables administrators responsible for campus safety both inside and outside facilities to issue alerts to address urgent and day-to-day events. Send Word Now was utilized at the University’s revamped Office of Emergency Management command center, as well as to notify upper management of weather-related school closings, security incidents or even planned utility outages that could jeopardize experiments at the research university.

Two years later, the mass shooting incident at Virginia Tech fast-tracked plans to extend the use of Send Word Now to cover the entire school—which is spread across three campuses—and ensure the University had a real-time, multimodal Emergency Mass Notification System (EMNS) that could be easily incorporated into a cohesive communications plan going forward. After considering 13 vendors, the University selected Send Word Now.

**Solution**

Send Word Now helps campuses improve readiness, response and recovery through better communication. Within seconds, administrators can send voice, text, email, desktop and other alerts to thousands of faculty and students, and get word back to determine next steps or assess if people are safe. Send Word Now provides the most intuitive user interface in the industry, with a wide range of options, and the ability to only select the services that meet specific campus needs. It offers superior customer support, with every customer assigned to a dedicated Customer Support Manager (CSM) and given access to live assistance 24/7.

With the Send Word Now award-winning alerting and collaboration solution, Boston University can provide important alerts and updates to address urgent issues such as an active shooter, severe weather, cyber attacks and more.
“It was the easiest to use, it allowed us to conveniently update contact information, it was the least costly, and we knew the customer service was terrific,” Morash says.

Send Word Now’s SWN Direct mobile app is a fully integrated app for EMNS alert recipients. The app utilizes Internet Protocol (IP) end-to-end, which eliminates many of the common problems associated with traditional alerting channels and opens new capabilities like Audience Visibility—the ability to know who is “on-net” and able to receive a message before an alert is sent. Send Word Now also allows users to send one-way alerts rapidly to a large group of stakeholders, intelligently mobilize teams, facilitate collaboration, including document sharing, during a crisis, and receive a response from contacts through two-way alerting.

Results

Morash uses Send Word Now from OnSolve to communicate with his team, who reply electronically with their status and ETA in responding to any incident. The service is also used for one-way notifications to the University’s 33,000 students, plus faculty and staff.

Boston University has been able to meet its goals for the new mass notification solution and has expanded beyond the original intent. Key results realized include:

- **Greater Transparency and Communication** – When Boston University experiences an emergency, Morash quickly learns which of his team members will respond, and when. “That’s important because we make decisions based on the level of staffing we’ll have,” Morash says. “We can have anywhere from 15 to 30 people in the command center.”

- **Simple, Opt-In Messaging** – Boston University administrators can easily provide OnSolve with a spreadsheet of contact information for BU community members, who choose how to be notified. “I was shocked at how easy it was,” Morash says. “And it allows the University to easily notify folks if they’re in harm’s way.”

- **Emergency Response During Major Events** – The system was used extensively during the Boston Marathon bombing and subsequent manhunt in 2013, but it’s also used for more routine notifications such as road closures, fires or any other situation that could affect the community.

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