Selecting an Emergency Mass Notification System

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Emergency mass notification system needs vary across organizations. As a result, the selection criteria can change drastically depending on the size and location of a university, school district, corporate organization, medical center, or military base.

Despite the different challenges and solutions, there are a number of important factors that all organizations must consider when selecting an emergency mass notification system.

Integration

Whether an organization already has an emergency notification system in place and is looking to expand or is considering longer-term future additions, considering the system's ability to integrate is essential. If the institution already has one or more products or systems in place, it's crucial that the new system works well with those components, not only for cost effectiveness but to ensure a cohesive system overall. Even if a company is looking to implement a system for the first time, it may be thinking long term. An organization will more than likely expand the system at some point, whether it's with the same vendor or not.
Not considering the integration factor can cause problems down the road as an organization looks to build out or add on to different system components.

Notification Coverage

Mass notification systems can range from simple to elaborate, and it's easy for a customer to fixate on specific services or products when reviewing the different offerings. It is important to remind them to keep the big picture in mind and always come back to the end goal. What is the organization looking to achieve with its emergency mass notification system?

In many cases, the answer is comprehensive notification coverage.

Comprehensive notification coverage generally requires a variety of alerting methods to overcome obstacles that may prevent personnel, visitors, students, faculty, or staff from receiving an emergency alert. Where are individuals located when the emergency occurs? Do they have access to a computer or mobile device (and is it powered on)? Are they in an area where they can see or hear the alert? All of these are potential obstacles that can prevent people from receiving an emergency alert.

The answer is to adopt a system that provides multiple communication channels for sending and receiving an emergency alert.

Alerting and Notifying

Ensuring that individuals are alerted to the fact that there is an emergency is important, but how does an organization go about providing specific information and instructions to personnel across multiple facilities?

Sounding a warning tone gets people's attention, but it does not convey information about the emergency at hand. Organizations should consider an emergency notification system that does both—sounds emergency tones/visible strobes and displays or speaks an emergency message that notifies individuals of the emergency and appropriate steps to ensure safety.

Code Compliance

Finally, organizations should be mindful of important mass notification codes and mandates when selecting an emergency notification system. These will of course vary depending on whether you are working with a higher education institution, medical center, military base, etc.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act specifies that emergency preparedness and response programs be accessible to people with disabilities, including emergency mass notification and access to information.
- The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) reauthorizes the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) and mandates under federal statutes that universities and colleges issue emergency warnings. The HEOA further establishes requirements for timely warning and emergency notification.
- In addition to its core focus on fire alarm systems, the National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code (NFPA 72) includes requirements for mass notification systems used for weather emergencies; terrorist events; biological, chemical, and nuclear emergencies; and other threats.
- The Rehabilitation Act requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 was specifically enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals.
- Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC) requirements mandate that organizations must provide real-time information to all building occupants or personnel in the immediate vicinity of a building during emergency situations.

About Alertus Technologies

Alertus Technologies is a pioneer and market leader in emergency mass notification systems for large-area, high occupancy facilities. Since 2002, Alertus has engineered innovative solutions for unified mass notification, in-building notification, outdoor notification, and personal notification. Thousands of institutions and enterprise organizations worldwide trust and rely on Alertus to protect millions of people.

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