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Case Study: InformaCast® Solution

Multi-campus/Statewide Emergency Notification System

- Industry
  Higher Education
- Challenge
  Culmination of comprehensive crisis management planning involved the need for a stable emergency notification system that could access multiple locations quickly and provide continuity in the notification process
- Solution
  Implementation of InformaCast paging software that, in conjunction with the Desktop Notification System, and SchoolMessenger, allows contact across campuses through IP phones and speakers, legacy paging systems, computer desktops, SMS text messaging, and email
- Benefits
  - Cross-campus, "one-click" notification for speed and consistency of messages
  - Control over who can access and send messages, integrated with Active Directory
  - Easily scalable to diverse environments
  - Able to broadcast to different technologies, including overhead IP speakers, IP phones, desktops, legacy paging systems, and (with SchoolMessenger) email and SMS text messaging

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Bob Hammonds
System Director
KCTCS

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The Client

Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) was formed in 1998 and grew into 16 technical colleges with 67 campus locations, 105,000 students, and 10,000 employees. KCTCS also houses the Kentucky Board of Emergency Medical Services and the Kentucky Fire Commission. KCTCS has no dorms; all of its students commute, with some of them travelling over an hour to attend class.

The Business Challenge

KCTCS recognized the need for a crisis management plan/process that remained consistent across its many campuses and could reach all of its students and staff easily, quickly, and through as many technologies as possible to ensure receipt.

KCTCS gathered together a committee comprised of personnel from Crisis Management, the IT Department, Public Relations, and different college representatives in order to gain a wide perspective of the needs that must be filled by a comprehensive emergency notification system. Said Bob Hammonds, System Director – Crisis Management, Environmental Health, and Safety at KCTCS, "We didn't want to just make a decision, arbitrarily, and hand it down to the colleges. We wanted their input and buy-in from the start."

Having set its evaluation criteria and receiving buy-in from multiple groups across campuses, KCTCS assembled a list of vendors and began evaluating them. Singlewire's InformaCast was the clear winner. "It fit our particular needs. It was the product that simply gave us the tool we needed to culminate our crisis management plan." said Hammonds.

InformaCast can send out audio and text messages to IP phones and speakers and legacy paging systems. Through InformaCast's group functionality, KCTCS can send notifications to a particular building on campus, to a campus, or to a college. By pairing InformaCast with Singlewire's Desktop Notification System application, KCTCS could get its messages out using not only IP phones, IP speakers, and legacy paging systems, but also to computer desktops. With the additional purchase of SchoolMessenger, KCTCS could also send messages via SMS messaging and email. The combination of InformaCast, the Desktop Notification System, and SchoolMessenger allowed KCTCS to use every piece of technology available to it to get emergency notifications out.

Crafting the Solution

Once the decision was made, KCTCS worked with its VoIP provider, CBTS (a subsidiary of Cincinnati Bell), to prepare the network environment needed to support such a solution. Singlewire and CBTS worked closely together to ensure that the implementation went smoothly and KCTCS was happy with the final product.

Said Derrel Cone, Technology Solutions Project Coordinator at KCTCS, "We took the InformaCast product and put it at [CBTS's] location where our CallManager server is. And so, it was rather painless in the fact that we didn't have to go to multiple locations. We were able to go to one spot, load it, and get it working."

Since KCTCS uses Microsoft Active Directory and InformaCast can import that information, KCTCS used its Active Directory structure to control staff's access to messages and their rights as users.

Watch the Video

The video case study of this story is available at www.singlewire.com/kctcs.

- About Singlewire
  Headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. Since 1993, Singlewire has delivered technology solutions that drive bottom-line results for our clients. Our entrepreneurial spirit and values guide us, and we continue to set the standard for uncompromising customer support and technical leadership.

- Why Singlewire
  Singlewire provides a one-stop shop for design, implementation, and support services for IP telephony. We provide our clients with ways to reduce the cost and complexity of their computing infrastructure so financial resources and personnel are freed up for more strategic initiatives.

- Talk With Us
  www.singlewire.com/talkwithus

With the software installation complete, KCTCS began shaping SNAP—or Safety Notification Alert Process—its own, branded emergency notification system. SNAP can reach 8,000 IP phones and countless computer desktops, and it's integrated with KCTCS's text messaging system, meaning that it can reach thousands of phones in minutes. "We are able to pick and choose how we want to structure the system," said Hammonds. "We have the ability in the system office to blast it to the entire state--all of our offices, all of our colleges, campuses. We have also given each college the ability to break it down as they see fit."

For the broadcast of messages over IP phones, a main component of InformaCast, KCTCS can virtually take over any phone included in the broadcast. Said Hammonds, "We can actually take over all of our phones and turn [them] into loudspeakers....We control the volume—we can interrupt phone calls—to give the message and get that message out." The same situation is possible with InformaCast combined with the Desktop Notification System. According to Hammonds, "Our computer screens turn a bright color. We kind of take over the computer screen and put a bright message, and then there's a bar that goes across and gives them the message with directions." For students who have signed up for text message alerts, messages appear in much the same way on their cell phones, with the aid of SchoolMessenger.

Results: A Reliable and Versatile Emergency Notification System

In January of 2009, KCTCS really put SNAP to the test. An ice storm in Kentucky caused communications infrastructure damage the equivalent of a 6.2 earthquake. KCTCS's communications were unaffected: it was able to get notifications out to campuses, and campuses could contact each other because of the redundancy and ease of use built into InformaCast and the SNAP system.

Said Hammonds, "It's something that's used much more frequently than we ever anticipated. We knew we had emergencies and we knew things went on, but since we've implemented the system, it's been phenomenal."

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>
> **Bob Hammonds**
> **System Director**
> **KCTCS**

Students are appreciative of the level of communication KCTCS has adopted. According to one testimonial, "As a new student, I really appreciated being informed of the school closing early in the morning. I live in Clarksville and SNAP saved me a good 45-minute drive to school just to find out that the school is closed."

By allowing KCTCS to set up messages, create groups who will receive those messages, and choose the devices that will receive those message, InformaCast stands as the backbone of the SNAP system. "We can hit that one button, and then it does it all," said Cone.

The end result is a powerfully informed system of campuses that can communicate directly with each other, students, and their parents through a variety of devices, ensuring that, in the case of an emergency, everyone is apprised of the situation and can act accordingly. Says Hammonds, "One person's life is worth much, much, much more than what we've invested in this system. The comfort that it gives a person in my role is I know we can't prevent things from happening, but I feel comfortable …knowing we can alert people…and potentially save lives."

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