



Ivy League school adds an additional layer of safety and security with emergency notification



Customer Profile:

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school in a vibrant urban environment located in the heart of University City, Philadelphia. The Penn community comprises nearly 52,000 students, faculty and staff, plus a network of contracted employees.

Problem:

The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting incident underscored the critical need for a robust mass notification platform that could reliably reach the campus community within minutes.

Solution:

Intelligent Notification enables Penn to send alerts to tens of thousands of people in minutes, by email, SMS and voicemail. Call Bridge lets Penn instantly convene the entire Penn Crisis Management Team by conference call to assess and respond to a crisis.

Benefit:

Rapid, reliable mass notification provides Penn an additional layer of safety and security.

The University of Pennsylvania adopts a rapid two-way notification and response platform to alert the Penn community of faculty, staff and students, and convene the Penn Crisis Management Team to evaluate and address a crisis.

Keeping the University community safe

Providing peace of mind to faculty, staff, students and their parents is a key initiative for any academic institution. Rapid, mass notification during a crisis is critical to ensuring the safety of a university population. This was highlighted in April 2007 with the tragic shooting deaths of 32 people at Virginia Tech. That seminal event increased the adoption of emergency notification solutions in schools nationwide.

Penn was already evaluating state-of-the-art mass notification technology alternatives before Virginia Tech, confirming a pre-existing need to implement a solution.

The Problem: How to notify a community of thousands at once

In the early 2000s, the best ways to reach many people across campus with specific messages were manual phone trees and basic blast emails. These methods were laborious and slow, and relied on people either being near their phone, or online and checking email. As smart phones with SMS, voicemail and email became popular, emergency notification technology took advantage of these modalities. When Penn sought a way to quickly reach all 52,000 members of its campus community as well as parents in other parts of the country, it looked for a solution that would take advantage of all the communication technology available.

The Solution: Intelligent Notification

In July 2007, Penn concluded its selection process, choosing Intelligent Notification as it met the criteria for technological capability, system speed, data security, ease of importing contact data, customer support and company financial strength. MIR3 worked closely with DPS and ISC to ready the system in time for fall semester, and the "UPennAlert Emergency Notification System" was successfully launched in 2007. Since then, the system has undergone continuous testing, including two annual campus-wide drills and several real-life scenarios.

The system's speed and effectiveness have consistently exceeded the University's expectations, by effectively reaching the entire University community in minutes. This has given Penn much higher confidence that Intelligent Notification will prove to be a reliable notification solution in a crisis. Penn also relies on the Call Bridge feature which can gather all members of the Penn Crisis Management Team into an instant conference call wherever they are, day or night, expediting team decision-making and response to incidents.

"It's reassuring to know we have a system that in the event of a true emergency, when we push that button, we're going to notify 52,000 people within minutes."

—Maureen Rush
vice president for public safety
University of Pennsylvania

Campus-wide drill at Penn sets notification speed record

In October 2009, Penn ran its second annual campus-wide test of the UPennAlert system. While the results of the 2008 test were well within performance targets, the results of the 2009 drill surpassed expectations. In only 7.5 minutes, 74,000 SMS and email messages were sent to over 52,000 people. The system has delivered similar results in several real life scenarios.

Intelligent Notification helps Penn enhance campus notifications with:

- **Customization** – The Web services API enabled Penn ISC to map the features of Intelligent Notification to the UPennAlert custom interface, putting a "Penn" brand on the system.
- **Data security with SAS 70 compliance** – MIR3 hosts all data in geographically dispersed, multiple-redundant data centers, meeting the highest standards for safeguarding data security and privacy.
- **Ease of use** – Launching a notification can be done in seconds with three easy steps. On-call initiators can log in from anywhere with an Internet-connected computer and choose to send critical communications immediately.
- **Target recipient groups** – Intelligent Notification can send messages to specific groups of people, organized by geographic zone or recipient type (faculty, staff, student, etc.). This enables Penn to geographically target members that may be near an incident.
- **Recipients manage their own contact data** – DataSync self-registration application allows faculty, staff and students to maintain their contact information securely. This data is immediately updated in the UPennAlert recipient database, keeping the contact database current.
- **Instant conference calls to rapidly manage crises** – The Call Bridge feature lets members of the Penn Crisis Management Team instantly join a conference call by just pressing "1" on their phone keypads. All team members can be gathered immediately to respond to emerging crises.

The bottom line

Intelligent Notification adds an additional layer of security to Penn's public safety program providing its entire community with rapid, reliable, effective mass notification. Says Maureen Rush, vice president for public safety, "One of the things that we work very hard on is making sure we communicate the value of the system. Parents have our promise that we're going to do everything possible to keep their sons and daughters safe through our notification system."

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