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Code Blue Takes Pride in Innovation and Integration

By Lindsey Coulter

The University of Illinois at Chicago has served as a springboard for great research, ideas and at least one highly successful emergency communication products firm. Code Blue, based in Holland, Mich., was born out of a project completed for the university in 1989. Then, university officials sought an aesthetically pleasing way to mount exterior intercoms, and found it in an enclosure produced by the fledgling company. That project helped propel Code Blue to its current position as a leading manufacturer of emergency communication solutions.

"From there our enclosure business boomed. We've gone from one enclosure option to 25 variations," said David Fleming, director of marketing and design for Code Blue Corp. "From there it's blossomed into the products you see today."

Those products include vandal-resistant Blue Light Emergency Phones, Help Point emergency signaling devices, and incident response and systems management solutions with full diagnostic capabilities. The company's early offerings have been also improved to now include public address systems, camera mounts and mass notification software. Incandescent lighting has been replaced by more modern LED options, solar powered units have become available and the products have benefitted from upgraded materials.

A Tailored Approach

As no two customers are alike in terms of product application, power source, communication preferences or mounting capabilities, Fleming says the company has responded by becoming much more specialized, transitioning from simple intercom enclosures to offering a full security end-point. In 1997, Code Blue developed its first hands-free analog emergency speakerphone, and in 2010 launched its IP (Internet Protocol) line. ToolVox Media Gateway made its debut in 2009, while Blue Alert MNS (Mass Notification System) was released in early 2013.

"It's not so much a one-size-fits-all [approach] with our products, but we have a catalog of products that allows customers to find what they want. Through options and customizations, the final solution is really tailored to their environment," Fleming added. "That can [apply to] everything from the enclosure down to the software configuration. Some enclosures are meant for open spaces, some are meant for door or gate entry environments, and some are meant to be near sports fields and have an AED defibrillator housing."

"When a campus comes to us, what they're looking for is a two-way communication solution; the ability for individuals to communicate with a first responder, secu-

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rity professional, police department or administration," Fleming added. "Also, they're now looking for a way to be able to send a message from those individuals out to the greater population."

As such, Code Blue Help Points and other products allow individuals to send messages in, and allow schools and universities to broadcast messages or alerts out to the campus community. The company has even expanded into the social media realm, disseminating messages via email, text or closed circuit television.

"We can't rely on the fact that if you push a message out one way, everybody will get that message immediately," Fleming said. "Timeliness is a critical component. By having a multi-layered approach where many different systems are providing the same message at the same time, you have a better chance of connecting with the individuals."

Shifting Security Needs

Whether Code Blue is working with a new or existing client, the company goes to great lengths to ensure that client is matched with the ideal system and solution. The company reviews the institution's existing systems, network, power capabilities, location and goals. If those goals include public address, surveys of the campus might be conducted to ensure messages can be effectively heard across open areas. If customers would like the products to also act as assistance

or customer service devices, those local support functions can easily be integrated alongside more security-based functions.

"We try to figure those things out up front so we know what we need to craft to provide the best possible solution," Fleming said. "Over the years it's gotten increasingly more complicated as technology has changed and needs and demands have grown. There was time [when] security was more or less about responding to a situation and then recovering after the fact. Today, organizations want to be able to do more with their security; to not only respond when something happens, but to make the best effort to try to prevent things from happening in the first place."

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Company Name: Code Blue Corp.
Headquarters: Holland, Mich.
Founded: 1989
Company Type: Emergency communication, incident deterrence and management
Employees: 35
Markets: Universities, K-12 schools, parking, stadiums, parks and recreation, health care, waterfronts, corporations, mass transit, municipalities, shopping centers, and casinos

Another shift in the emergency communication market is that students are showing a greater interest in their school or university's security infrastructure. "Oftentimes students and staff are the biggest proponents for our products and services," Fleming said. "We get three to four inquiries a week from students who want to know more about our products because they're either writing articles about them in a student newspaper, or want to raise money or awareness to add our products to their campus."

Increasing Integration

As client needs become more diverse, partnerships and system flexibility become increasingly important for Code Blue. The company's Chief Operating Officer, David Cook, recognized these marketplace changes with regards to IP technology and systems integration, and several years ago began developing Code Blue for the next generation.

"One of the biggest evolutions over the past year for our product line has actually been the integration with third-party products. We've worked really hard to develop partnerships with a lot of major security providers so our phones can work with their systems — and our systems can deliver emergency notifications to their platforms — all in the name of giving the customer a choice in how they want to set up their system," Fleming said.

This focus on integration and consolidation helps institutions streamline their emergency communication activities and offer more timely responses.

"We pride ourselves on putting our products on open standards, which makes it so much easier for us to communicate on a technology level with other providers," Fleming continued. "We build our products hoping customers see their quality, but it's just as important to know they're getting what they need to be able to keep people safe. We want the customers to be able to decide for themselves what the best solution is for them."

Building Partnerships

The company's latest partnership with ELERTS is a prime example of Code Blue's commitment to integration. ELERTS, based in Weymouth, Mass., specializes in public safety communication platforms using smartphones, and uses mobile technology to combine official-sourced alerts with crowd-sourced reports.

ELERTS applications also provide a mobile escort option so the user, potentially a student or faculty member, can notify the institution's security personnel that they are safe walking across campus at night. Rather than having to alert someone when something happens, security personnel are alerted when nothing happens. It also follows the user's path so the responder knows their location.

"In the case of ELERTS, they really understand the mobile application perspective and how to best provide an infrastructure to support that," Fleming said. "We provide an emergency communication device perspective along with the mass notification software side of things. So, what we're doing is providing a way for the customer to bring those systems together so they don't have to operate them independently. This is another example of how integration can give the customer a way to maximize the investment they've already made by providing new features and functionalities."

Now, more than 25 years after its first education contract was completed, Code Blue systems and devices have been installed at the University of Nebraska, Michigan State University, the University of Tennessee, University of Wisconsin and many other institutions, serving thousands of students, staff and faculty members. Building on its progress and partnerships, the company is already planning to introduce new products and services to the school and university security market.

"We're going to have some unique features that haven't been available to the marketplace to this point," Fleming said of the company's next move.