



EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

UNIQUE COMMUNICATION ON CAMPUS

Communication solutions on campuses can fix a variety of student issues, not just emergency incidents

By Michael Zuidema

Emergency communication solutions like blue light phone towers and call boxes have been commonly used tools at universities and colleges for decades. Their visibility, durability and reliability continue to give students, faculty, staff and visitors an easy way to request assistance for a wide range of situations, whether it's reporting a suspicious individual or simply seeking help for a malfunctioning parking gate.

BOOSTING USE

One challenge these institutions face, however, is figuring out a way to encourage the use of these devices to extract the highest return on their investment while also providing safety and security to large campus audiences. As a result, some locations may feel like blue light phones are underutilized or unnecessary, especially if students feel like they aren't being encouraged to push the button and place a call. In these types of situations, the campus population can feel like these products need to be treated like fire alarms—only to be used in extreme circumstances.

That is a good way to ensure no one benefits from their presence.

While blue light phones obviously can be a powerful resource for emergency situations, more and more universities are taking advantage of their placement and versatility to provide additional functions to benefit the entire campus. Indiana State University, for example, encourages students to use Help Points to request late-night escorts on campus, while the University of Central Florida told its student newspaper that most of the calls it fields are related to automobile issues, like a driver forgetting where they parked or a dead car battery.

Additionally, the University of California, Berkeley, has created posters in the past that encouraged the use of blue light phones, while other schools are now retrofitting their units with additional security tools—like public address speakers, surveillance cameras and more—to further boost safety and security on campus.

START WITH A NETWORK OF SOLUTIONS

Meanwhile, the University of British Columbia added some easy but unique customizations to its blue light phones to help communicate to students that it is all right to use them more frequently in a wide range of scenarios.

Located in Vancouver, the University of British Columbia is situated on the western tip of the Point Grey peninsula, with a magnificent 993-acre campus surrounded by forests on all sides before opening up to the Pacific Ocean. With more than 54,000 students and 14,000 faculty and staff, it is consistently ranked one of the top public universities in the world and has been home to eight Nobel Prize winners, 71 Rhodes Scholars and 65 Olympic medalists over the years.

According to its website, UBC's mission is to "create an exceptional learning environment that fosters global citizenship, advances a civil and sustainable society and supports outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada and the world." In order to help



maintain that prestigious reputation, UBC places an emphasis on fostering a secure campus environment that is based on respect and civility. That can be a unique challenge for leading university in a city with a population of more than 630,000 and more than 2.4 million people in the greater metro region.

Located in high traffic areas are Help Points, 9-foot tall pedestals topped with a powerful LED beacon/strobe light and known for their rugged durability and multifaceted features. They also include IP5000 VoIP speakerphones that give people the opportunity to request assistance in an easy and efficient manner.

A number of Help Points also are equipped with Overhead Camera Mounts that give UBC security personnel the ability to effectively monitor situations on campus. Managing the entire system is Code Blue's ToolVox, a sophisticated systems management platform that provides an efficient means to test and program emergency units.

ADD CUSTOMIZATIONS

UBC officials worked to determine a way to encourage more people to take advantage of the blue light phones located throughout campus. Together with the manufacturer, they created customized recessed buttons that the university feels will be better suited to its audience by being more tactile and visible.

"The change made it more accessible and sensitive for our campus,"



UBC Campus Security Operations Manager Ali Mojdehi said. “That was something based on our feedback, and [the company was] accommodating to our feedback which made it a more positive experience.”

Universities should always work with the the companies supplying their product to create the most effecient and useful tool for their campus. Whether it's the paint, graphics, configurations or more, the company will strive to make sure universities are able to find the right solution.

“We understand that the needs for each of our customers are going to be different,” Code Blue Chief Design Officer David Fleming said. “That is why we offer a number of unique modifications to suit their specific applications, plus the flexibility to create custom solutions when they require an even more personalized experience.”

UBC also made a change to the wording on its Help Points in an effort to encourage the student population to engage in more open communication with UBC safety and security personnel.

“We feel it is one of those systems that students can engage with quickly and access help if needed,” Mojdehi said. “One thing we did was change the wording from ‘emergency’ to ‘assistance.’ We found that people may not feel or know if it was an emergency for security or police. To make them feel more comfortable and make us more accessible, we had the units say assistance.”


That subtle-yet-effective change has resulted in more calls, which hopefully is giving the entire campus community the peace of mind that help is available at the touch of a button.

The entire campus population should feel comfortable pushing the button on a blue light phone. Students have more than enough to think about during the semester. Why should safety be one of them? Having



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the access to request help quickly and easily hopefully will help them both feel safe and be safe.

Regardless of the application, tragic campus incidents involving active shooters, vehicle attacks, bomb threats and other dangerous incidents unfortunately have proven that it's vital for universities and colleges to have the proper tools in place that allow the campus community an opportunity to easily communicate with first responders when help is needed most. 



Michael Zuidema is the Marketing Operations Manager for Code Blue Corp.