

# 8 Options for Layered Emergency Notification

Adopting several of these mass notification technologies will ensure everyone in your community has the information they need to stay safe during a crisis. **By Michael Zuidema**

**L**ayered security is a term that continues to grow in popularity as more and more organizations determine that employing only one system of defense isn't guaranteed to provide an appropriate level of prevention or reaction during an emergency situation. That expansion certainly applies to delivering emergency alerts.

High-profile incidents like the Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook shootings have boosted the demand for sophisticated mass notification systems that provide multiple means of communication with a large audience. One projection indicates the mass notification market is expected to be worth more than \$6.4 billion by 2018.

On the surface, that makes perfect sense. The more layers you use to deliver messages, the more likely you are to cover all of your bases. While that theory contains a certain amount of truth, the bigger picture is more complicated. It's one thing to make sure your messages are noticed. It's another to ensure they elicit an appropriate response.

According to a 2013 study conducted by the University of Texas at Austin titled "Using Multiple Channels and Sources to Combat Noise and Escalate a Sense of Urgency," the most effective way to get across the level of seriousness for any given situation is to send multiple messages through multiple channels.

"The reason why I think it has to be redundant today is that increasingly we're being hit with so many different messages through mobile devices, through desktop computers ... we have lots of different communication channels," Dr. Keri K. Stephens says in a video supporting her study. "The challenge for organizations is when they have a real emergency, something really important to communicate to people, they need to be able to reach us."

Stephens' research also showed that in-person communication is the most effective method of conveying urgency. Again, that's a logical conclusion since person-to-person contact guarantees a captive audience, while alerts delivered to a cellphone, for example, may go ignored or unnoticed. How often do we think to ourselves, "I'll check that later," when we receive a text or email and are engaged in a conversation or meeting? It's too easy — and now too common — for us to assume we'll catch up later, which is fine unless we're neglecting key information that can help keep us safe.

However, human interaction isn't 100% infallible either. Important details can be missed or confused — anyone who played the "Telephone" game growing up knows this all too well — not to mention the fact that individuals who are alone could be inadvertently omitted. This, once again, reinforces the need for a

multilayered approach for effective emergency communication.

To achieve a comprehensive system that can deliver messages that are both reliable and redundant, it's important to consider these solutions:



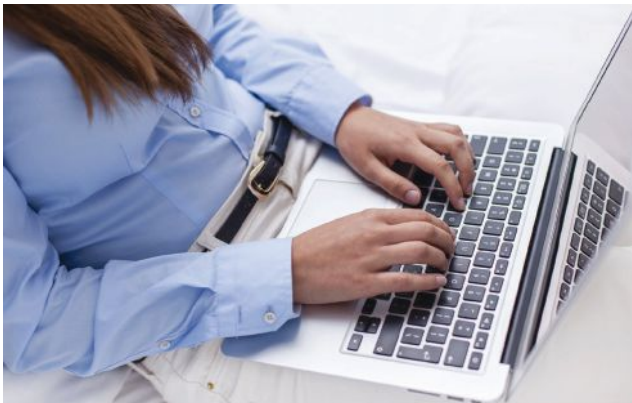
**Public Address:** Whether they're indoors or outdoors, public address speakers are generally a foolproof way to grab the attention of a large group of people. However, it's important to keep intelligibility in mind to ensure the message is being both heard and understood. It's easy to be loud; it's more important to be clear.



**Cellphones:** While it's commonplace for people to receive email and text message alerts instantly via cellphones, the ubiquitous presence of mobile technology also has directly led to the swift rise of safety apps that provide direct two-way communication with first responders. By employing messages that are brief and clear, organizations can cover a lot of ground in an instant.



**Social Media:** No one denies the sweeping power of social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, and that influence continues to expand in the security sector. During the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, for example, local police and hospital personnel were able to use social media to help correspond with concerned citizens since more traditional means of communication were temporarily unavailable.



**Text/Email:** They may not be perfect tools to deliver emergency alerts, but there is no doubting their usefulness when used in conjunction with other notification systems. Email and text messages remain a great way to send complicated and detailed instructions, especially if they hear an alert first via public address. Email and text also are good mechanisms to warn people who may be offsite and unaware of a potentially dangerous situation.



**Digital Signs:** Many locations will use these as instruments for marketing and general information, but they also can be useful tools during an emergency. The integration of digital signs is especially valuable for the hearing impaired and any visitor who may not be keyed into a location's other security platforms.

**Blue Light Phones:** The notion that pedestals and call boxes equipped with emergency speakerphones and beacon strobe lights are an outdated technology is premature at best. Not only can most blue light phones on the market be integrated with a variety of additional security solutions, like CCTV, public address speakers, automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and more, but their durability, reliability and visibility make them an invaluable tool for emergency communication.



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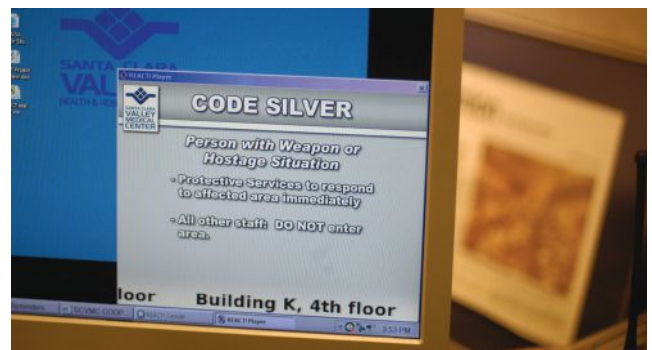


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**Desktop Alerts:** As prevalent as the use of cellphones and social media may be, computers remain just as universal, especially at universities, hospitals and corporations. Displaying messages where individuals are working is an added measure of making sure vital information isn't ignored or missed.

**Fire Panels:** Technological advances mean locations are no longer simply receiving a system that sounds a horn and flashes a strobe during an emergency. Instead, new systems can be integrated to offer a wider array of notifications and functionality.

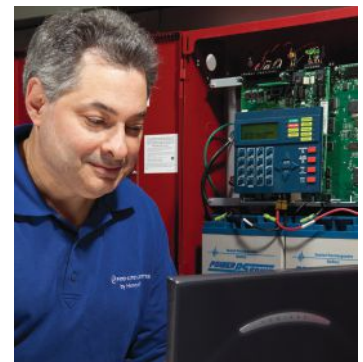


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Relying on a single means of communication is no longer an acceptable way to maintain safety and security. There are simply too many options available today that can easily work together to provide a broader measure of protection. It's absolutely vital to have a layered emergency communication solution in place that can be integrated and redundant.

When a crisis occurs, you want to take every measure possible to ensure that people have the information they need to be safe. **CS**

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