
Enhancing Customer Service through Security

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June, 2015



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Introduction

“Nobody ever pushes the button.”

This has become a common refrain from individuals and locations that have either invested in emergency communication solutions, such as the commonly known Blue Light Emergency Phones and hands-free speakerphone devices, or are have explored the option of installing additional safety measures intended to bolster their security. Looking aside the fact that perhaps this could be taken as an encouraging sign of the high level of security that exists in their area as a result of these physical devices, it’s a shortsighted model. Fire alarms and smoke detectors are rarely, if ever, used in a large number of institutions, but no one would suggest that these life-saving tools should be eschewed as a frivolous expense.

Instead, locations should embrace the versatility that emergency communication solutions provide, not only from a safety and security standpoint, but also with advanced customer service-related applications that can be easily utilized in a variety of scenarios. With a little proactive planning, a Blue Light Emergency Phone can be transformed into a fully customizable communication path – one that has the ability to provide a direct link to on-site personnel equipped to quickly and efficiently respond to requests, both big and small.

Background

In 1989, Code Blue was selected by the University of Illinois at Chicago for a project that involved the installation of security standards on its campus. In the more than 25 years that have followed, Code Blue's trademarked cylindrical pedestal that is now commonly known as a "Blue Light Emergency Phone" has become the standard at thousands of education, corporate, hospital, airport and municipal locations around the world.

The need for direct contact with first responders remained strong as headlines stemming from horrific events such as the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007 and the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013 prompted locations to offer additional methods for communication and security. For many locations, it was assumed that obvious emergency situations like active shooters, fires and reporting suspicious individuals would be the only necessary application for Blue Light Emergency Phones. But as the needs and requirements of locations have shifted over time, emergency communication solutions have been forced to offer more flexible and customizable options for a wider array of diverse applications.

Challenge

As technology continues to advance, particularly with mobile cellular phones, it's become popular to dismiss fixed communication tools as outdated or unnecessary devices. It's an assumption that lingers, despite evidence indicating that these devices are seen as visible security stations capable of a variety of safety-related functions.

While a personal emergency – anything from a car that won't start to getting lost in a large campus setting – may not necessarily be perilous or wide reaching, it does highlight the potential need for assistance aside from traditional police or 911 personnel. For example, The Rapid bus line in Grand Rapids, Michigan, chose to install dozens of Code Blue Help Points[®] along its newly constructed Silver Line that explicitly state all calls will be forwarded to 911. Assistance with ticket problems and general questions are handled by a separate information kiosk on site, although both options easily could have been handled by the Help Point[®] installed by Code Blue, an enhancement many locations may not even realize is possible.

Many people prefer to talk directly with an individual who is on site rather than be routed through a third party service or forced to search through a labyrinth of hard-to-navigate websites, guides, brochures, etc. It's far more efficient and clear – not to mention reassuring and comforting for the individual – to have direct contact with someone on site who can easily answer questions and provide swift assistance. Surveillance cameras are invaluable tools, but the need to be both seen and heard remains. Blue Light Phones also have the added benefit of guiding people to the preferred resource for their needs instead of automatically defaulting to 911.

The challenge is showing locations that emergency communication solutions will provide an increased level of customer service that increases the return on their investment.

Solution

Emergency communication solutions do not have to be viewed as some sort of necessary evil. Contacts like 911 and general 800 numbers are vital, but the ability to speak with someone directly on site can be just as beneficial. Cell phones may be largely ubiquitous these days, but a visitor still can be hesitant or confused about who to call to request assistance in a large campus setting.

Hands-free speakerphones provide this direct link, offering a valuable service that can be even more beneficial for locations that are automated or not staffed by knowledgeable personnel. This is achieved by providing multiple buttons on the faceplate, one used for the type of potentially dangerous situations normally associated with Blue Light Emergency Phones, and a second that can be used to make calls to request directions, help with car trouble or malfunctioning gates. Housed in pedestals, wall-mounted call boxes or flush mounted directly into a wall, these speakerphones are durable and reliable enough to last for years with minimal maintenance.

Additionally, Code Blue's analog and VoIP speakerphones come equipped with built-in contact closures that may be used to activate a strobe or camera or door access applications, and have recorded message capabilities that allow brief messages to be played for quick response in a number of areas, including those that are remote or rarely accessed. Adding multiple and custom faceplates with surveillance cameras, directory listings or other security devices only increases the potential of these devices. Integrated public address speakers can deliver paging notices and general announcements. They also can work with a number of leading independent call systems, such as those provided by Cisco and Avaya, for even more functionality and options.

The end result is a fully customizable information kiosk that can not only fulfill questions and requests, but provides help at the touch of a button[®] in emergency situations.

Benefits

Many locations already are realizing the advantages that come with expanding the potential of their emergency communication solutions. The University of Toledo, Penn State University and Indiana State University are just three examples of institutions that encourage students to use Blue Light Emergency Phones to request late-night escorts across campus.

Two Indiana State students told a local television station in Terre Haute that they hope they'll never need to use the Code Blue units for an emergency, but they appreciate the strong commitment the university has taken to ensure their safety.

"If we're coming back from work or something really late at night, they'll help come and walk you to your dorms, especially late at night," Indiana State student Prabjyot Jhatu said. "That helps a lot."

"We knew they actually cared about the students, because they were trying to protect them," Pavaan Bojwa said.

Penn State Chief of Police Tyrone Parham told the student newspaper that most students already use the emergency communication products on their campus for situations that aren't dire.

"The few times they are used, they are typically used for non-emergencies, such as a car breakdown," Parham said. "We still take those calls, though, and make sure we get an appropriate resource there to be used."

These benefits are being enjoyed by more than just colleges and universities, though. The customer service-related aspects of Code Blue products have been utilized by a variety of locations, including airports, hospitals, stadiums, shopping malls, parking lots, casinos, municipalities, corporations and more.

The City of South Haven, Michigan, installed a pair of Code Blue Help Points® at their local beaches understanding that while they may help prevent future drownings, they more likely will be used for an assortment of citizen and tourist requests. The Fourth of July holiday frequently quadruples the size of the city from 5,000 citizens to more than 20,000, overwhelming cellular networks and creating a number of logistical issues.

"Efficient communication between the public and first responders is the biggest benefit we expect," South Haven City Manager Brian Dissette said. "The call boxes will also be equipped with contact to the city's non-emergency phone system, which will allow the public to contact the city's staff to address questions about the city, special events, beach parking rules, etc."

Simply installing visible security devices can go a long way to enhancing the customer experience. According to a study published by the International Foundation for Protection Officers, the number one reason people shopped at one place compared to another was safety. If a customer doesn't feel safe in a store, they typically will leave or shop somewhere else. As a

result, security should be seen as approachable and always present.

In fact, the advantages that Blue Light Emergency Phone pedestals and call boxes possess for customer service purposes aren't all that different from security needs. They include:

- **Pinpoint location:** Advance knowledge of their placement provides instant information upon activation.
- **Rugged durability:** Constructed to resist the punishment of natural and man-made disasters.
- **High reliability:** In addition to taking the element of human error out of the equation, phone service won't be jammed or lost due to high levels of traffic or storms.
- **Universal accessibility:** Easy to operate and available for anyone to use at any time.
- **Crime deterrence:** Their presence alone can cause individuals to think twice before committing a potential crime.
- **Self-diagnosing:** Alerts are instantly sent if there is an issue or malfunction with the speaker, button or microphone, meeting UL 2017 standards for emergency signaling and preventing on-site staff from needing to regularly perform manual tests.

"I think they are necessary in some capacity if for no other reason than public perception," Bill Elvey, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning and Management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said during a 2014 webinar on the topic of school security. "When parents and visitors come to our campus, they expect to see those things and they recognize that when they are out there that connotes a safe, secure campus."

Conclusion

The life-saving potential of emergency communication solutions cannot be overstated. However, it is also important consider additional non-emergency applications for a two-way communication path. Whether it's helping someone with a flat tire, giving visitors directions or responding to a malfunctioning gate in a parking lot, there are a bevy of customer service scenarios that will be assuaged by embracing the versatility of the products offered by Code Blue.

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About Code Blue Corporation

For more than 25 years, Code Blue Corporation has been the industry leading manufacturer of durable emergency communication solutions. The pioneer in developing and producing vandal-resistant Blue Light Emergency Phones at thousands of education, corporate, hospital, airport and municipal locations around the world, Code Blue's expansion includes the innovation of advanced public address and mass notification systems to provide a complete end-to-end solution.

Founded to address the growing need for sophisticated audio security solutions, Code Blue offers American-made Help Point[®], Emergency Signaling, Incident Response and Systems Management products that are innovative, rugged, powerful and easily integrated.

Code Blue's evolution continues with the engineering of new software and hardware designed to meet the ever-changing needs of customers who require an advanced level of incident deterrence that establishes a safe environment. No matter where you go, you can feel safe knowing that there is help at the touch of a button[®].