

CASE STUDY: University of Delaware



UD ALERT: How the Blue Hens Manage Emergency Notification on Campus

The University of Delaware has a reputation as a state-of-the-art institution, and when the university needed to select a system to notify its students and staff in the event of an emergency, they wanted a state-of-the-art solution. Selection criteria for the university's alert emergency notification system included searching for a system that was user-friendly, sent messages via voice and text to a variety of communications devices and that worked rapidly and reliably. The university has four campuses, as well as teaching facilities overseas—so the ability to reach anyone, anywhere at any time was a key consideration.

A Geographically Dispersed Campus

With a main campus that spreads out across the town of Newark, and four unique campus locations throughout the state of Delaware, the university wanted a way to quickly and eff

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Emergency Preparedness
Coordinator at UD

actively reach its students and staff to ensure their safety and security. Marcia Nickle, emergency preparedness coordinator at the University of Delaware, said, “In a true emergency, we would use every means available to reach students, faculty and staff at all of their contact numbers. Our intent is for individuals to receive the message multiple ways so that no matter where you are, you will receive vital, critical information quickly.”

UD chose Send Word Now® as their mass notification provider. The university has also extended use of the system to include local businesses, the Newark Fire Department and the Newark Police Department. Nickle said the self-update feature of the system has been beneficial with regard to managing various points of contact in the system. “We wanted something so that all of our stakeholders could manage their own information, so that we don't have to worry about hunting people down to verify contact information.”

Nickle said that with four campuses in Newark, Wilmington, Lewes and Georgetown, it is important that all are tied to a single system since staff and students may travel between campuses throughout the day. Nickle said one of the benefits of the system is the ability to not only notify students by campus, but also by building or residence hall.

UD's Best Practices

The university developed a set of best practices for using the Send Word Now system, and it is only used during major emergencies when there is a clear and credible danger to the university community. Examples of when UD Alert would be activated include the presence of an active shooter on campus or a severe weather event. Other best practices include sending messages that consist of quick, concise information and the establishment of a chain of command for message sending.

The university publicized UD Alert through their website, during student orientation, and through postings in residence halls.

Passing the Test

In March 2008, the University of Delaware and Boston University tested the system and reached 214,000 contact points, including cell phones, e-mail, landlines, and BlackBerry® devices in under a half hour. UD considered the test to be successful, and continues to test the system once a semester to ensure the speed and reliability of the system.