

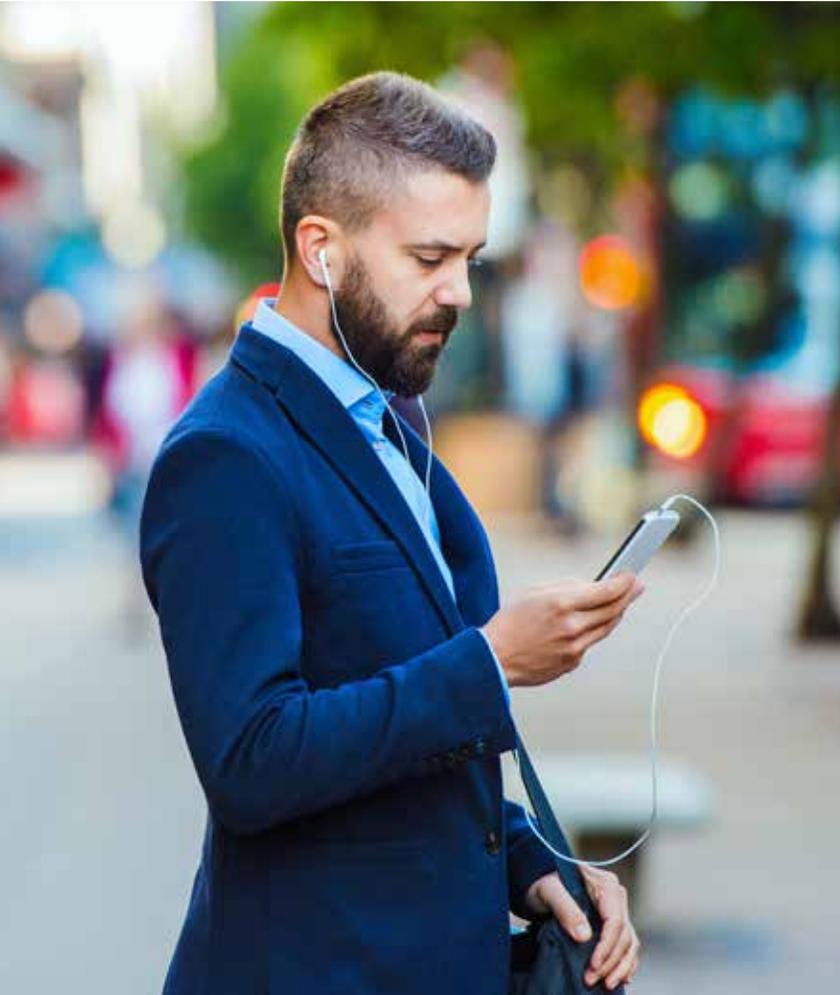
# Clear Communication During Emergencies

**POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS**

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# Preparing for an uncertain world



In the past year, the world seems to have become a more dangerous place. Terrorist attacks, mass shootings and natural disasters change the world we live in and highlight the importance of sharing critical information during emergencies.

However, many organizations do not have the infrastructure in place to properly communicate with everyone. Misinformation can spread quickly as rumors on social media, text messages and news outlets muddle the conversation. This poses a danger to everyone involved as people do not know where to go, what kind of danger they are in and how they can find safety.

In this white paper, we will examine real world examples of emergencies and analyze the issues surrounding misinformation that spreads during these situations. We will also share best practices to implement in your organization to help avoid these same pitfalls should you need to manage an emergency.

## Utilize what you have

A good first step when developing any communication plan is to assess what processes and tools are already in place. It's important to understand how information is being delivered to identify potential weaknesses

**Following tornadoes in Tuscaloosa Alabama in 2011**, it was discovered that the Alabama Trauma System, a system designed to prevent hospital overload by helping reroute patients to other facilities, was underutilized. The system is supposed to help prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed by patients that need trauma care. However, during the aftermath of the tornado, hospitals were finding either too many or too few trauma patients being routed to their facilities.

## Analyze the tools available and make sure they are being used to their fullest potential.

This was a result of communication taking place directly between ambulances and hospitals. Since they did not go through the Alabama Trauma System, patients were not routed in the most efficient manner. Analyze the tools available and make sure they are being used to their fullest potential. It may seem easier to skip certain steps, but this can lead to confusion and ultimately harm the procedures that are in place to keep everyone safe and informed.

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## Testing ensures effectiveness



Many options are currently available for emergency notifications systems, but issues can arise if they are not tested properly. Simply adding a system to your security plan does little to help when an emergency occurs if no one knows if the system will actually work when it is needed.

**This was an issue the French government encountered during the terrorist attack in Nice in July of 2016.** In anticipation of the UEFA Euro 2016 soccer tournament being held in France, the French government launched an emergency notification app to keep people informed should an incident occur. However, according to the Huffington Post, during the attack, people using the app did not receive any information until nearly three hours after the attack commenced. The app, which uses geolocation to determine who to send alerts to, told users in Nice there were no incidents occurring during the attack.

**A similar issue occurred in Kalamazoo, Michigan during an active shooter event in February of 2016.** While an Uber driver went on a shooting spree around the county, the Western Michigan University security team failed to send out an alert to students through its channels. Following the incident, the university president said he would be reviewing the guidelines for how they address these kind of situations to keep students informed.

It's important to think of every scenario that might warrant an alert to your organization's population. Having these procedures in place ahead of time can save headaches and confusion when a crisis occurs. In the same vein, regular tests help keep everyone familiar with these procedures and also test the capabilities of the system you have in place. This means you can identify and fix any errors or issues so everything runs smoothly when an emergency happens.

## Contact people using the right channel

During an emergency, high volume can cause congestion on cellular networks. That's why it is important to utilize multiple channels to reach people. **For example, people in Boston experienced challenges during the marathon bombing attack in 2013.** This issue arose when everyone used the network at the same time. This included the people in the area trying to make outgoing calls, and people outside the area trying to reach people inside it. This taxed the network and made it difficult for calls to get through.

Service providers advised people use text messaging and emails so emergency calls could get through. Phone calls can jam a network when too many are taking place at the same time. However, text messages and emails have a better chance of finding an opening for delivery when a message is sent.

Continuity Central recommends taking advantage of smartphones, since those devices are often able to connect to Wi-Fi networks. This provides options for reaching out to people using social media, email, and other messaging apps that can operate without a cellular network.

Clear communication also involves keeping the right channels clear. Assess the different channels available to reach people, and understand what will be the most effective given the situation. Keep in mind that certain channels may be flooded and messages may get lost.

## Communicate across multiple channels to get information to the people that need it.



## Social media can help and harm



According to the Daily Dot, our awareness of violent events has concurred with the rise of social media. As these channels become more ubiquitous, everyone is empowered to become a source for information. But while this can help spread the word at the onset of an emergency, it can also hinder the response to an ongoing incident by adding confusing and incorrect information into the conversation.

**Such was the case during an active shooter incident at UCLA in May of 2016.** The Washington Post reported about misinformation spread through social media and traditional news outlets. Students were alerted through the school's official notification system, but access to their phones meant they were able to look for additional information on other channels such as Facebook, Twitter and local news websites. This led to rumors about the number of shooters and their locations on campus that increased the fear and anxiety caused by the situation.

This isn't the first time social media has caused an issue when responding to active shooter incidents either. **During the San Bernardino shooting in December of 2015, the Press Enterprise reported similar challenges faced by law enforcement.** While some information was useful in providing updates about areas that should be avoided, again rumors sprung up that added to the confusion. Despite more information being available, it's increasingly more difficult to fact check that information's accuracy during an emergency.

**Similar issues occurred years earlier during the 2012 theater shooting in Colorado.** People took to social media and law enforcement were forced to dig through distracting misinformation and hoaxes, and men with names similar to that of the shooter found themselves harassed by people who did not have the proper information about the event.

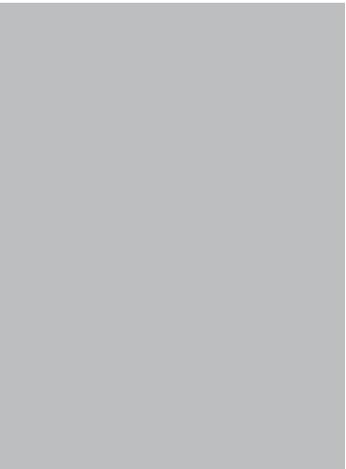
Establishing a reliable channel for communication is a critical component of an emergency response plan. This can help keep personnel informed and updated regularly, but also serves as a source for the media who can recognize it as an official channel to receive information from. This can combat misinformation and aid officials in providing an efficient response to a given situation.

# Best practices for clear communication

These are just some of the challenges organizations can experience during an emergency.

At CBTS, we are dedicated to utilizing the latest technology, research and resources to help organizations provide the best response to emergencies. This can help keep people informed and safe by sharing the right information in a timely manner.

**To help minimize misinformation, we have put together seven tips for providing clear communications during a crisis.**



# 1

## Utilize a single system

When a crisis occurs, time is of the essence. Safety and security personnel don't have time to log in and out of different systems to send multiple messages. A single system that reaches everyone helps share vital information quickly.

# 2

## Reach multiple devices

Your system should reach landline phones, mobile devices, desktops and even digital displays. Every available device that can reach your personnel should be utilized to inform them of the situation.

# 3

## Provide regular updates

Combat misinformation by sending customized follow-up messages after your initial alert goes out. Include more specific information about the situation and what steps students and staff should be taking to remain safe until it has been resolved.

## Designate groups

Use your notification system to determine who receives certain messages. During an emergency, everyone should receive an alert, but to help manage the crisis, instructional follow-up messages might only need to be sent to certain groups. Select these groups ahead of time for more efficient crisis management.

# 4

# 5

## Build message templates

Prepare for any scenario by pre-building message templates. These messages can be sent immediately at the onset of a crisis to provide basic information that initiates safety procedures.

## Send multiple formats

Ensure you reach everyone by sending your notification in multiple formats. Phone calls, SMS texts, push notifications and emails make it more likely everyone receives your message during a crisis.

# 6

# 7

## Gather Your Team

Certain systems will give you the ability to instantly bring together your crisis management team in a conference call. This is especially helpful when people are likely to be in different areas and need to begin collaborating quickly.

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CBTS helps organizations in North American and Canada easily send crucial information to their personnel during an emergency. Learn more about how you can start using Informacast in your organization: [www.cbts.com](http://www.cbts.com)

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