



# THE FOUR PILLARS OF NOTIFICATION

ORGANISATIONS HAVE A DUTY TO PROTECT THEIR MOBILE WORKERS AND STAY IN TOUCH WITH THEM IN AN EMERGENCY. NICK HAWKINS EXPLAINS WHAT BUSINESSES SHOULD LOOK FOR IN AN EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM

In November 2015, Paris fell victim to the single deadliest terror attack in French history. March 2016 saw a series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks leave Brussels in a state of shock. July 2016 brought yet more fear and uncertainty in Nice. Most recently, New York was targeted with bombs and Hurricane Matthew caused devastation across the Atlantic.

Unexpected events are becoming more common.

In tandem, the mobile workforce is growing. According to research by Strategy Analytics, almost half the world's employees will work away from a single office by 2020. The effect of globalisation on business means employees are regularly travelling between locations, often to different cities and countries. As a consequence, keeping mobile workers safe from harm is rising up the corporate agenda. Organisations have a duty to protect their employees, yet Ernst & Young says only 30% of companies have a system in place to track business travellers.

Creating a strategic, non-intrusive, failsafe communications plan can be challenging. Today, crisis communications software can help businesses to communicate with employees in any circumstance. Businesses need to educate employees to encourage involvement and the willingness to share information.

So what should businesses look for in an emergency communications platform?

There are four 'pillars' of mass notification: assess, locate, automate and communicate.

Dynamic location tracking and alerting is important in safeguarding employees. However, deciphering the location of

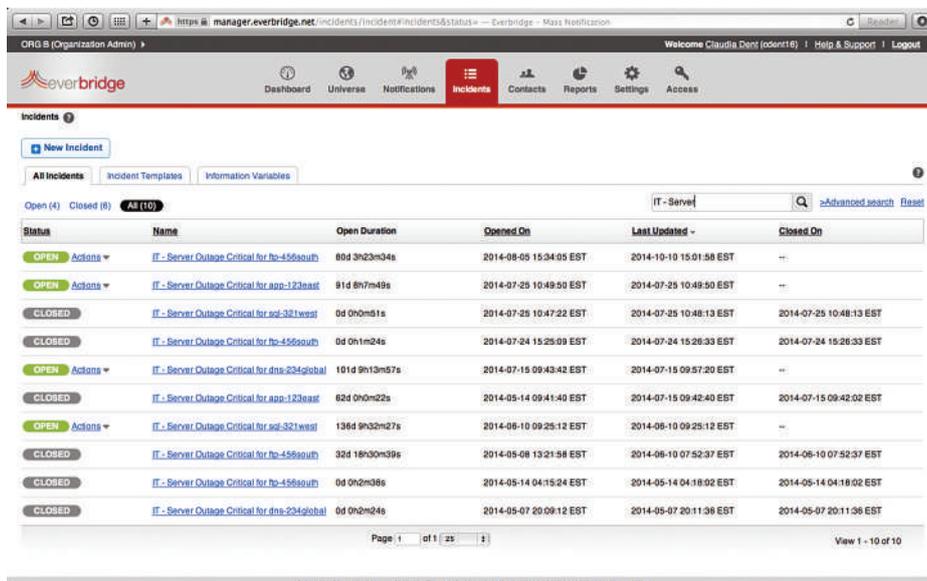
employees can be challenging and any system needs to consider three categories of location: static, last-known and expected.

Static location – where an employee works most of the time – can be accounted for by assigned office location. Wi-Fi network points and building access information can indicate where an employee is in an emergency.

Last known location – where a mobile employee is currently working – relies on data received from public WiFi hotspots. Expected location can be determined through the integration of hotel systems, employee calendars and corporate travel management systems.

This data enables communications platforms to send messages to a targeted geographic region – whether that is a specific building, floor, neighbourhood or postcode. For example, if a fire breaks out in a corporate office on the fifth floor and an emergency alert is sent to all employees in the building, organisations could quickly deduce that three employees used their security badges to swipe into the fifth floor but only one responded to the emergency alert. This gives organisations an early indication that the other two employees could be in danger.

Location alerting can also be used for community engagement in natural disasters, such as flooding or a terrorist attack. In many US states, it is mandatory to share contact information with the local government, and residents increasingly opt to provide more of their devices and contact paths. Direct access to citizens' details enables mass notification in crises such as the Boston bombings and Hurricane Matthew.



The State of Connecticut uses the Everbridge mass notifications platform and is one of the largest state-wide notification deployments in the nation. Connecticut authorities can communicate critical information directly to hospitals, emergency response agencies, businesses and residents across the state to keep them safe and informed. Europe is beginning to adopt the US state-wide communications strategy, too, with the Municipality of Pisa in Italy sending alerts to citizens by fixed telephone, mobile, email and apps on smartphones.

Cutting-edge communications systems use mapping features to ring-fence areas to target with specific messages. This has been used to communicate with neighbourhoods when children have been missing, as well as quickly distributing information on suspected criminals that are at large.

### Multiple modes

No communication path is 100% reliable, 100% of the time: Wi-Fi fails, mobile networks go offline and apps crash. Relying on one contact path could therefore be a costly risk. For this reason, critical communications platforms should have multi-modal functionality – the ability to send out notifications using many different communications channels, including SMS, email, VoIP calls, social media alerts and app notifications amongst many others. This ensures messages get through to the right people at the right time.

Crisis communications platforms should automate the time-intensive communication process, improving an organisation's emergency response times. 'Storybooks' can be created to coordinate responses to various emergencies. By creating these during implementation, templated messages can be sent to relevant people with the click of a button. The persistent sending of notifications using multi-modal techniques provides employees and civilians with the peace of mind

that their safety is paramount. Integration into human resources systems ensures employees' contact information is readily available.

Another important function is easy to deploy: two-way communication between an organisation and its employees. This enables employees to let the organisation know with the push of a button whether they are 'safe' or 'not safe'. The result is vastly improved response rates and a faster, clearer picture of who needs help, which enables the organisation to prioritise those in danger.

Combined, multi-modal and two-way communications can increase the effectiveness of a communications platform, delivering 90% of responses or greater in a matter of minutes.

### The power of smartphones

Organisations can capitalise on the capabilities of the device employees are most likely to always have on or near them – the smartphone. The in-built location mapping data means they can locate and communicate with their staff during emergencies and determine if they are safe or need assistance. They can receive regular updates and alerts regarding their employees' last known locations so if a crisis occurs, data is readily available, allowing incident management teams to co-ordinate a more effective response and prioritise resources to help those most at risk.

### Protection vs privacy

Concerns about work/life balance and privacy are inevitable. There is a degree of education involved in the successful roll out of a critical communications system and the most credible providers will work alongside businesses to ensure alert templates are non-intrusive from the outset. It is not abnormal to experience a degree of reluctance and the key is to ensure employees maintain control. The advantage of using smartphones is location-mapping can be turned off, negating any privacy issues when the employee is not travelling.

### Where are you?

The most advanced platforms offer SOS alerting and 'safe corridor' functionality through smartphones. Safe corridors prompt employees to regularly 'check in' – for example, during a taxi journey back to a hotel in a dangerous country, an employee could activate the function and if they did not check in regularly, this would be flagged to the employer and communicating with them would be made a priority.

An employee who has inadvertently strayed into an unfamiliar or dangerous area can use their mobile phone to trigger an SOS alert. Once the panic button has been pressed, the platform immediately sends an alert to the organisation detailing the employee's location and any relevant audio or visual data, enabling them to alert the emergency services.

Employers have to accept three truths: in the future, employees will travel more; the world will continue to become more uncertain; and employees will expect more from their employers when they are travelling for work. Combined, this could be an HR headache, but in reality, it is an opportunity. It can help engage employees, protect their safety and increase their loyalty to a company. A fully functional critical communications platform provides the reassurance and immediacy to support employees if and when the unexpected happens.

**THERE ARE FOUR 'PILLARS' OF MASS NOTIFICATION: ASSESS, LOCATE, AUTOMATE AND COMMUNICATE**

*Nick Hawkins is managing director EMEA at Everbridge ([www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com))*