MIR3
INTELLIGENT NOTIFICATION

True Confessions *of a*
NOTIFICATION INSIDER

✦ **PART 2** ✦

Secrets, tips and lessons learned

Untold tales, tips and tricks about notification

While communication tools are a great resource to help you with your job, a tool alone does not make you an expert at communication. Whether you use a loudspeaker or broadcast system, a manual call tree, an email blast or a full-featured notification tool, the crafting and delivery of notifications requires that you understand and implement the right processes to get your message across clearly. No matter what the event, you must deliver messages at the right time, convey the right information and provide a way for recipients to respond in a useful way.

We can all learn from our mistakes and we can also take advantage of the lessons that others before us have shared. At MIR3, we have the opportunity to talk with customers and learn from their experiences in effective use of notification in delivering critical messages. In analyzing the information, we have discovered five common mistakes that happen again and again. We share this information and best practices to help you benefit from the mistakes other professionals have learned in the course of crisis communication.

Common mistakes include:

- **Delay in notification** – Waiting too long to release information or send a notification to various groups of recipients can cause confusion and speculation

- **Content** – Incomplete, confusing, or wrong information is not helpful; the content of the message needs to be accurate, succinct and understandable

- **Scattershot messages** – Sending the same message to everyone is often not the best practice; messages need to be customized and targeted for different groups, as do options for required responses

- **Poor timing** – Too early or too late can create challenges. Message content needs to be considered based on the timing of the message

- **Inflexible delivery** – Relying on one (or just a few) means of reaching individuals often results in poor contact and message delivery. Especially when a major regional event happens, relying on more delivery methods rather than fewer can increase the likelihood of success

While these common mistakes don't cover all the things that can go wrong during communication processes, we can learn from them and eliminate some of the major mistakes by following a simple process in creating and delivering messages.

Ask Yourself:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **When?**
- **How?**

Who Roles and responsibilities

- Who determines content and audience?
- Who will approve the activation of an alert?
- Who will deliver the message—who is it actually from?
- Who should receive which information, and through which avenue?
- Who is your ultimate audience?

What Sending the right message

- Keep it short and sweet
- Prepare ahead
- Be consistent
- Guard your tone
- Read it aloud
- Target your message
- Pre-build messages
- Establish home bases—safe responses that are generic enough to use in many different situations
- Focus on your organization's key messages
- Continue to bring responses back to home base
- Message elements:
    - Content
    - Brevity
    - Call to action
    - Specific responses

When Is it time to sound the alarm?

- Be timely – don't delay
- Don't jump the gun
- Don't include too much detail
- Target your information and timing

How Which method is more likely to reach your audience?

- Loudspeaker
- Manual call tree
- Cell, desk or home phone
- Email
- SMS
- Pager
- Automated tool

Message Mapping

Prepare ahead of time by creating a chart like the one below. Once you fill in this chart it will become easy to quickly evaluate who should send and receive messages, and determine the right modes of delivery when the pressure is on. This structure can help build your communication plan:

Predefined Message 3						
Predefined Message 2						
Predefined Message 1						
How soon should it be sent/ delivered?						
What delivery methods/ means should be used?						
Who should deliver the message? (who should it be from?)						
Who has authority to approve release of the message?						
Who is the Audience for the message?						
Situation/ Scenario						

Message Mapping

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Situation/ Scenario	Who is the Audience for the message?	Who has authority to approve release of the message?	Who should deliver the message? (who should it be from?)	What delivery methods/ means should be used?	How soon should it be sent/ delivered?	Predefined Message 1	Predefined Message 2	Predefined Message 3

Different situations call for different means of notification delivery, depending on the recipients you are trying to contact. Not every message will need to be delivered to the same devices or by the same modalities every time. However, be aware that limiting the modalities for delivery can often hinder the success of the communication.

Consider ahead of time if there may be times when specific, targeted devices might be the best way to reach your audience.

Building notifications ahead of time will help you deliver succinct and appropriate messages with minimal effort when the time comes. A bonus when messages are prepared in advance is that your legal team has a chance to weigh in, which could precipitate faster release of messages when they are needed. Use the threats identified in your risk assessment to target what type of events you will need to include in these pre-built messages.

Construct your message by building it within the following context:
- What is the incident?
- Who are your stakeholders? Who is the targeted recipient?
- What are three key messages that can be pre-built?
- How will recipients get the message, and how can they respond?

Remember to think about the response options you need to include in your message:
- Consider what you need to hear from recipients
- Keep it short and simple
- Make it easy to respond
  - Via email
  - Keypad selection
  - Voice response

Does your organization need automated notification?

As we explore further, the capabilities of a full-featured notification tool quickly outshine those of traditional methods like email blasts, phone blasts or the time-honored manual call tree. With the ability to define escalation paths for critical messages and the ability to receive an intelligent and meaningful response, you can eliminate the risk of reliance on a single person.

How can a notification tool help?

- **Speed** – A good tool will make it easy to deliver a message to virtually any number of recipients in just moments

- **Consistency** – A tool can accommodate prepared messages, guaranteeing that all alerts follow proper protocol and use approved company messaging

- **Right message to the right audience** – A tool allows you to sort recipients into groups and hierarchies, making it easy to tailor your message to match the audience

- **Minimize unnecessary social chatter** – By quickly putting a corporate message out by all possible venues you can more readily squelch gossip and speculation, and if it does come along, you can quickly react with more information

- **Pre-built and dynamic message creation** – A notification system will allow you to prepare, store and access messaging to fit just about every situation.

The adoption of a notification system is likely to need executive support, but fortunately, when the benefits are explained that's not a difficult task. The value of a tool can be defined by the following benefits:

- Efficient communications
- Fast activation of resources
- Minimal confusion
- Control the message; dispel rumors
- Gather information through two-way communications that allow for response
- Quickly address safety of all
- Reduced liabilities

While notification tools usually start by addressing a specific use case in many organizations, the expansion of a notification solution across the enterprise can make justification of the expenditure much more cost-effective. Notification tools can be used in variety of business areas, including:

- Crisis communications
- Business continuity/disaster recovery
- Employee health and safety
- IT alerting
- Customer notifications
- Vendor/supplier notifications
- Business operations

Getting the most out of your tool

If you have a notification tool today, or plan to implement one in the near future, make sure you are getting the full value from that tool. Reach beyond email and SMS, because while these are often the first two modalities that we think about in planning notifications, there are many other means of reaching individuals and delivering messages. Email, for many people, is not available unless they are in the office. And while SMS is a good option for many, we recommend that you craft notifications using every possible modality for every recipient. Whenever possible, capture and use multiple phone numbers for each individual.

Choosing the best tool

If you don't have a notification tool today, or you are thinking of changing the tool you have, be sure to consider the following in making a selection:

- Focus on reliability and delivery of the solution
- Verify the product's capacity and delivery by talking with existing customers
- Is there resilience within their platform?
- How does the product's failover work?
- Is infrastructure geographically distributed?
- Talk to customers, understand their experiences
- Look for an open platform, one that is easy to integrate into other solutions
- Make sure there are multiple ways to integrate your data. Look for automated synchronization and integration for data sources to feed the notification solution
- Does the notification solution provide a strong API for building notifications into other enterprise applications?
- Does the solution offer automated integration with ITSM tools for one-way and two-way integration?
- Does the solution offer workflow customization tools for notification integration?

Summary

There are many ways to get an important message across, and each of them will work when used in the right situation. If you are in a company that is using call trees or phone blasts and that is working, then honing your message can only help. If your company has outgrown systems you've used in the past, now is the time to start investigating a notification system that allows you to do more. Remember that with a clear, concise message delivered by every possible means, you and your organization stand the best possible chance of protecting lives, resources and your bottom line when interruptions strike.

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MIR3: Proven technology, global reach

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