



Ivy League school adds an additional layer of safety and security with emergency notification

The University of Pennsylvania adopts a rapid two-way notification and response platform to alert the Penn community of faculty, staff and students, and convene the Penn Crisis Management Team to evaluate and address a crisis.

Customer Profile:

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school in a vibrant urban environment located in the heart of University City, Philadelphia. The Penn community comprises more than 50,000 students, faculty and staff, plus a network of contracted employees.

Problem:

The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting incident underscored the critical need for a robust mass notification platform that could reliably reach the campus community within minutes.

Solution:

MIR3 enables Penn to send alerts to tens of thousands of people in minutes, by email, SMS and voicemail. Penn can now instantly convene the entire Penn Crisis Management Team by conference call to assess and respond to a crisis.

Benefit:

Rapid, reliable mass notification provides Penn an additional layer of safety and security.

Protecting the university community

Providing peace of mind to faculty, staff, students and their parents is a key initiative for any academic institution. Rapid, mass notification during a crisis is critical to ensuring the safety of a university population. This was highlighted in April 2007 with the tragic shooting deaths of 32 people at Virginia Tech. That seminal event increased the adoption of emergency notification solutions in schools nationwide.

Penn was already evaluating state-of-the-art mass notification technology alternatives before Virginia Tech, confirming a pre-existing need to implement a solution.

The Problem: How to notify a community of thousands at once

In the early 2000s, the best ways to reach many people across campus with specific messages were manual phone trees and basic blast emails. These methods were laborious and slow, and relied on people either being near their phones, or online and checking email. As smart phones with SMS, voicemail and email became popular, emergency notification technology took advantage of these modes. When Penn sought a way to quickly reach all 50,000 members of its campus community as well as parents in other parts of the country, it looked for a solution that would take advantage of all the communication technology available.

The Solution: MIR3

In July 2007, Penn concluded its selection process, choosing MIR3® as it met the criteria for technological capability, system speed, data security, ease of importing contact data, customer support and company financial strength. The OnSolve™ team worked closely with DPS and ISC to ready the system in time for fall semester, and the “UPennAlert Emergency Notification System” was successfully launched in 2007. Since then, the system has undergone continuous testing, including an annual campus-wide drill.

The system’s speed and effectiveness have consistently exceeded the University’s expectations, by effectively reaching the entire University community in minutes. This has given Penn much higher confidence that MIR3 will prove to be a reliable notification solution in a crisis. Penn also relies on the call bridge feature, which can gather all members of the Penn Crisis Management Team into an instant conference call wherever they are, day or night, expediting team decision-making and response to incidents.

Campus-wide drill at Penn sets notification speed record

In October 2015, Penn ran its annual campus-wide test of the UPennAlert system. In only 5.5 minutes, 86,000 SMS and email messages were sent to over 50,000 people. The system has delivered similar results in several real life scenarios.

MIR3 helps Penn enhance campus notifications with:

- **Customization** – The Web services API enabled Penn ISC to map the features of MIR3 to the UPennAlert custom interface, putting a “Penn” brand on the system.
- **Data security with ISO 27001 and SSAE 16 compliance** – MIR3 hosts all data in geographically dispersed, multiple-redundant data centers, meeting the highest standards for safeguarding data security and privacy.
- **Ease of use** – Launching a notification can be done in seconds with three easy steps. On-call initiators can log in from anywhere with an Internet-connected computer and choose to send critical communications immediately.
- **Target recipient groups** – MIR3 can send messages to specific groups of people, organized by geographic zone or recipient type (faculty, staff, student, etc.). This enables Penn to geographically target members that may be near an incident.

- **Recipients manage their own contact data** – DataSync self-registration application allows faculty, staff and students to maintain their contact information securely. This data is immediately updated in the UPennAlert recipient database, keeping the contact database current.
- **Instant conference calls to rapidly manage crises** – The call bridge feature lets members of the Penn Crisis Management Team instantly join a conference call by just pressing “1” on their phone keypads. All team members can be gathered immediately to respond to emerging crises.

The end result

MIR3 adds an additional layer of security to Penn’s Division of Public Safety program providing its entire community with rapid, reliable, effective mass notification. Says Maureen Rush, VP for public safety and superintendent of Penn Police, “One of the things that we work very hard on is making sure we communicate the value of the system. Parents have our promise that we’re going to do everything possible to keep their sons and daughters safe through our notification system.”

"It's reassuring to know we have a system that in the event of a true emergency, when we push that button, we're going to notify 50,000 people within minutes."

Maureen Rush

VP for public safety and superintendent of Penn Police

University of Pennsylvania

For more information, visit us at onsolve.com