

WHITE PAPER

Seven Severe Weather Communication Mistakes

**That Can Negatively Impact
Your Business Resilience**



INTRODUCTION

At 7:00 PM EDT on March 15, 2015, the National Weather Service officially announced that Boston Logan Airport had received a grand total of 108.6 inches of snow for the year, an all-time record for the city. In just the last 21 years, Boston has seen four of its top five snowiest seasons.

Boston is not alone in its distinction for witnessing massive amounts of snow fall. States from Maine to Rhode Island experienced top-five accumulations for the 2014-2015 winter season. And, other areas of the Northeast, while perhaps not quite record-setting, experienced significant severe weather events, creating disruptions to travel and negatively impacting normal business operations.

While everyone is at the mercy of the weather in situations like this, proper preparation and rapid response can minimize its long-term effects. Fast, accurate and frequent communication with employees and residents is also fundamental to success.

No tool is better suited for supporting the required level and frequency of communication than a comprehensive emergency notification service like Send Word Now®. Emergency notification services are used by many of the world's leading companies to interact with employees, suppliers and other stakeholders in crisis situations. However, some organizations are still using archaic methods, such as phone trees and intranet postings for outreach, hoping the message gets through. Others may use a notification system of some type, but it is outdated or underutilized.



To address these barriers to effective crisis communication, we at Send Word Now have identified seven communication mistakes made by resilience managers. While these mistakes are directly applicable to severe weather situations, they also apply more broadly to virtually any critical event. Eliminating these mistakes can lead to lower risk exposure, better responsiveness and faster recovery—a recipe for saving time and money.

MISTAKE 1:

SLOW RESPONSE TEAM COORDINATION

In virtually every organization, there is a team of individuals to whom the organization looks for crisis response decisions. This team structure may be highly formalized with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Or, duties may be less distinct, with responsibilities assigned on an ad hoc basis. Whatever the case, bringing together these key individuals is often one of the first crisis response steps. Even in severe weather situations where forecasts may have provided some means of early warning, circumstances can change rapidly and the unexpected can occur. Not to mention, decisions will need to be made after the storm has passed. Rapid response team coordination is a must.

Unfortunately, in today's complex world of global and mobile workforces, rallying a crisis response team may not be as easy as simply calling a meeting in the board room. Manual approaches for dealing with this complexity may fare poorly. A calendar invite for an urgent conference call sent by email may not be seen. Or, if the meeting reminder is seen, time is often wasted as participants fumble with call-in numbers, meeting IDs and passwords. Further, calling personnel one at a time to bridge people in is a slow and inefficient process. The potential result is poor coordination, uninformed decisions and delayed response.

ANSWER: AUTOMATED OUTBOUND CONFERENCING

Comprehensive emergency notification services like Send Word Now make notifying and coordinating response teams easy and fast. When considering a notification service, make sure it offers features for automated outbound conferencing.

For example, Send Word Now lets you easily manage outbound conferencing. Here's how it works. A group of response team members is created within the application. Generally, this is set up long before a crisis hits, but it may be created on the fly as well. With the click of a few buttons, response teams are notified of the emerging crisis. While any contact device may be targeted, mobile or traditional phones are most useful in this case as, upon receipt of the notification call, recipients are given the option to press "1" for automatic transfer to an open conference bridge. The conference bridge can be a service already used by the company, or it can be a bridge provided by Send Word Now. This feature can dramatically reduce the time it takes to gather crisis response team personnel.

MISTAKE 2:

HAVING LIMITED MULTIMODAL ALERTING CAPABILITIES

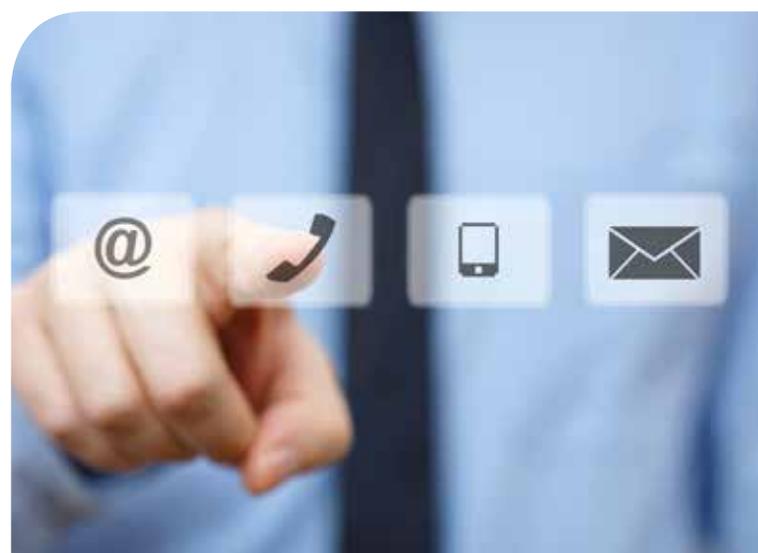
Organizations without a notification service typically rely on call trees,* email distribution lists or some other form of basic, manual communications channel. This approach might be sufficient if the group is very small. However, most companies need to communicate with a larger number of people, perhaps in complex ways. Single mode, hands-on methods are likely not effective in these situations.

ANSWER: MULTIMODAL FLEXIBILITY

Emergency notification services such as Send Word Now allow for "multimodal" communications, i.e., sending alerts through a wide variety of devices and channels. Multimodal alerting includes methods such as:

- Recorded messages sent through traditional or mobile phones
- Text messages converted to speech and sent through traditional or mobile phones
- SMS text messages
- Email

* For example, a manager calls five people, each of them in turn calls five people, and so on until everyone in the organization has been contacted





While these cover many of the communication bases, when choosing an alerting service, it is wise to consider other modalities as well. For example, the Send Word Now service provides capabilities for delivering messages through:

- [SWN Direct Recipient Mobile App](#)
- BlackBerry® PIN
- [Desktop Alerting](#) (messages “pop up” on computer monitors)
- Cisco® IP phones (messages are delivered to the screen of the phone)
- Digital displays
- [Web services](#)

The unique characteristics of the particular critical event may dictate which modality, or combination of modalities, should be deployed. For unexpected weather events, for example, sending alerts to all devices may be the right strategy. However, in an active shooter situation, sending alerts to mobile phones may be dangerous as their ringing can reveal an employee’s hiding place. Instead, silent notifications, such as desktop alerts, may be better suited.

Even if all of these modalities are not required when first implementing a notification program, selecting a service that offers flexibility is highly desirable.

MISTAKE 3:

TREATING NOTIFICATIONS AS A ONE-WAY STREET

Resilience professionals who are considering the implementation of a notification program are generally drawn to the technology for its ability to send outbound alerts very rapidly. This is understandable, as some services such as Send Word Now are capable of sending tens of thousands of messages within just a few minutes. However, with such rapid outbound capabilities, managers may overlook the benefits of receiving information back from recipients. Allowing alert recipients to indicate their health/safety status, ability to respond to a situation, confirmation they have received instructions, etc., through all of the various communication modalities can be a powerful tool for employee accountability and crisis response.

ANSWER: GET WORD BACK

When selecting a notification solution, be sure to choose a service that allows you to ask recipients a question and capture their feedback from within the notification. The management of this feedback loop should be simple, fully integrated into the message building process, and not presented in a separate application or screen. Recipients should be able to respond to the question using any communication device. And, data should be captured and summarized in easy-to-read reports for quick analysis and decision-making.

For example, Send Word Now offers its unique Get Word Back feature. This gives message originators the ability to construct a question and its associated response options from within the message creation screen. Recipients can respond to the question by using their touchtone phone, replying to an email or SMS message or utilizing other device-dependent means.

MISTAKE 4: FAILING TO USE GEOGRAPHIC TARGETING

Though weather systems may cover a broad area, the associated damage is often localized. This is typically attributed to the unique topographic characteristics of a region where certain locations are more susceptible to wind damage, flooding, etc.

In dealing with severe weather incidents, resilience managers sometimes make the mistake of failing to leverage the benefits of geographically targeted notifications. While there are times when focused alerting is not required, there are other occasions when such precision is very useful. For example, a manager may wish to communicate instructions and offer assistance only to those employees who reside in a flood zone following a torrential storm. Or, in a non-weather-related example, a company may wish to confirm the safety of employees who live in an area impacted by an act of terrorism or a demonstration turned violent.

ANSWER: GEO-TARGETED ALERTING

When choosing an emergency notification service, be sure to select one that offers capabilities for selecting respondents based on their geographic location. As an example, Send Word Now can automatically plot contact addresses on a map. During message creation, administrators have the option to select areas on the map to include (and/or exclude) in the notification. The application utilizes the power of Google® Maps, so users can zoom, access Google® Street View and switch from map to satellite view, all while interacting with a familiar user interface. Send Word Now provides easy map-based notifications, without the need to be a mapping expert.

MISTAKE 5: FAILING TO PROPERLY MAINTAIN CONTACT RECORDS

In severe weather, or any critical event, it is imperative employee contact data is accurate and up to date. Further, multiple points of contact for each employee is highly desirable to ensure messages get through if one or more communication devices are unavailable. Unfortunately, some resilience managers launch notifications during a crisis, only to discover a large percentage of their employee base is unreachable due to outdated or incomplete information.

ANSWER: RECIPIENT SELF-UPDATE AND WEB SERVICES

A notification service should allow for multiple ways to manage recipient data to ensure it is complete and accurate. For example, Send Word Now provides a number of easy methods for bringing data into the service. Two particularly useful approaches include Recipient Self-Update and Send Word Now Web Services.





RECIPIENT SELF-UPDATE

This functionality allows recipients to access and update their contact record through a secure online portal. Notices can be sent to recipients reminding them to confirm the accuracy of their information.

SEND WORD NOW WEB SERVICES

With this approach, contact information resides in another application, such as a Human Resources (HR) system. Employee data is pushed to the notification service programmatically and seamlessly based on administrator preferences. Since these external databases may be tied to payroll or other important personnel functions, the information is often more likely to be updated.

In all cases, it is important to understand and follow any privacy rules pertaining to employee information. However, allowing technology (like that available in Send Word Now) to assist in managing contact records can improve the overall effectiveness of emergency communications.

MISTAKE 6:

FAILING TO CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF A MULTINATIONAL WORKFORCE

Even if severe weather is centered on a particular region, the impact of the event can be far reaching. If headquarters is impacted, or if major supply chains are disrupted, it may be necessary to communicate rapidly with people around the globe. Consider other scenarios outside of weather, such as product recalls, cyber attacks or public demonstrations; it is abundantly clear that flexibility in communicating to a multinational stakeholder group is essential to success.

ANSWER: MULTILINGUAL ALERTING CAPABILITIES

To address this, be sure to choose an emergency notification service that is capable of easily handling the delivery of alerts in multiple languages. For example, Send Word Now allows employees and other contacts to designate the language in which they prefer to receive notifications. Administrators can create text versions of their message in up to 17 different languages. The service will then convert the text to speech in each designated language and deliver it to recipients based on their designated language preference. It is also easy to record audio messages in different languages and distribute them accordingly.

It should be noted that the functionality above does not provide actual translation of the message from one language to another. It is instead designed to provide a framework for managing the complexities of multinational communications. While technologies are emerging today that can theoretically translate words from one language to another, these should never be used to formulate emergency messages. It is highly unlikely these types of word and phrase conversions will be accurate enough for critical instructions. Messages should be translated accurately by a language expert, and then entered into the notification service.

Whether the situation is severe weather, or some other business interrupting event, utilizing multilingual emergency notification capabilities will ensure better understanding across the organization, and support a more effective crisis response.

MISTAKE 7:

FAILING TO PREPARE FOR INBOUND COMMUNICATIONS

Rapid, automated outbound communication is generally the primary reason companies subscribe to emergency notification services. With such powerful capabilities at their fingertips, resilience managers sometimes fail to adequately plan for inbound communication channels as means to communicate with employees and other stakeholders. Yet, in critical situations, such as severe weather where circumstances may evolve over time, employees, suppliers or others may attempt to call the company's main phone number seeking new information and instruction. This can bog down phone lines, consume scarce personnel resources and delay information getting to the people who need it the most.

ANSWER: INBOUND MESSAGE BOARDS

To avoid this potential mistake, make sure your notification service provides capabilities for calling into a designated number to obtain information. For example, Send Word Now offers two types of message boards for addressing inbound communication: recipient message boards and shared message boards.

RECIPIENT MESSAGE BOARDS

Recipient message boards allow individuals to retrieve specific messages that were previously distributed via an outbound notification. So, for example, an employee who missed an outbound voice notification could dial into a dedicated toll free number, enter her credentials, and hear a playback of the message. In addition, the employee is not limited to simply hearing a static playback of the recording; she is also able to respond to a question such as "Are you OK?" from within the voice message using her touchtone device. Her feedback is captured and available for reports which can be further used by administrators and incident managers for crisis response purposes.

SHARED MESSAGE BOARDS

Shared message boards are useful for posting recorded messages or instructions to a wider audience. Such messages can be retrieved by Send Word Now accountholders and non-accountholders alike. Shared message boards are great for disseminating non-sensitive information such as business hours updates, changing weather conditions, etc.



MANAGING IVR CALL FLOWS

In either situation, it is important inbound callers be greeted with clear interactive menus and automated instructions that allow them to find needed information quickly. To customize this interaction, you should also consider a solution such as Send Word Now's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Designer. This integrated feature allows administrators to create and customize inbound call flows using an easy drag-and-drop user interface. It adds even greater power and advantages to an organization's inbound communications capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Severe weather is a pervasive business continuity threat in the U.S. and across the globe. Add this to the myriad of hazards faced by organizations today, and it is easy to understand why rapid, accurate and secure communication is essential for effective response and recovery.

If you do not currently utilize an emergency notification service for resilience purposes, we at Send Word Now would be privileged to discuss with you its many benefits and our unique strengths. If you are already an emergency notification user, we hope you will avoid these seven communication mistakes and leverage the service to its fullest capability.

Take a Closer Look

Ready to see how Send Word Now can improve your communications?

CLICK THE BUTTON BELOW TO REQUEST A DEMO.

Request a Demo

About Send Word Now

Send Word Now is the leading provider of on-demand alerting for emergency communications. The company's easy-to-use, web-based notification solutions and mobile applications are used by businesses, government agencies, universities and non-profit organizations globally to ensure fast, effective, two-way communication when it is needed the most.

Send Word Now's enterprise-class notification service is capable of transmitting tens of thousands of voice and text messages in minutes, while providing a full audit trail for after-action reporting and follow-up. It is designed to reach anyone, anywhere, anytime, with any device, over any type of connection. Send Word Now was awarded "Notification System of the Year" by DRI International, and also received the Small Business Achievement Award from the Department of Homeland Security for its work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

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