NY-ALERT: Reaching the Masses with Time-Critical Information

Executive overview

Organization

Vision

Why SAP

Solution

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Organization
NY-ALERT

Industry
Public sector

Products and Services
Statewide mass-notification system

Web Site
www.nyalert.gov

SAP® Solutions
SAP® SMS 365® mobile service

As part of New York's ongoing commitment to providing critical emergency-related information and instructions for responding accordingly, NY-ALERT protects New Yorkers with a vital notification system. NY-ALERT is New York State's all-hazards alert and notification system. With the SAP® SMS 365® mobile service, NY-ALERT can send out **notifications to 3.6 million subscribers' mobile devices.**

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Sending alerts anytime, anywhere

NY-ALERT is a statewide mass-notification system that allows schools, universities, county governments, the New York State Department of Transportation, the State Office of Counter Terrorism, and others to notify New York residents through a variety of means. Fax, pager, e-mail, automated phone call, RSS feed to the Web site, and SMS messages are all options. Understanding today's mobile society, NY-ALERT messages can be proactively sent to mobile subscribers versus broadcast on the TV or radio.

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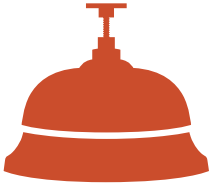
Reaching out statewide

The New York State Office of Emergency Management launched NY-ALERT, encompassing 800 different entities at 160 organizations that send out alerts. Out of the 64 campuses of the State University of New York, 60 use it – as do all 23 campuses of the City University of New York. NY-ALERT also services 31 counties and 19 state agencies and continues to grow.

Besides weather and traffic alerts, citizens can sign up at the NY-ALERT Web site to get AMBER and missing-child alerts, public health alerts such as flu vaccine clinics, consumer protection–board news, sex offender relocation alerts, and state and local government press releases.



800 entities

Enabled to send out alerts

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Reaching the right audience

NY-ALERT has 6.3 million subscribers, including 3.6 million people receiving alerts on their mobile phones, increasingly through SMS messages. The organization is adding 10,000 new subscribers each month. Every day between 1,400 and 1,800 different alerts are disseminated to different groups within the state of New York. That can generate a huge amount of traffic.

Kevin Ross, assistant director for technology at the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, explains, "In the last eight months, we sent out 156 million e-mails and 93 million SMS messages. That's up four times and nine times, respectively, from the same period a year ago."

NY-ALERT allows users to sign up only for the alerts they want. It has handled missing-person alerts to residents within a two-mile radius of a city that resulted in just 10,000 SMS messages. Localizing efforts such as this helps eliminate unnecessary notifications.

"During one of this winter's storms that hit New York City and the surrounding counties, we sent 1 million SMS messages in 15 minutes, along with 388,000 phone calls and 4 million e-mails. The system never hiccupped."

Kevin Ross, Assistant Director for Technology, New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services

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SAP SMS 365: playing a vital role

"When we launched NY-ALERT, we used simple mail transfer protocol, or SMTP, to SMS gateways to send messages to the wireless carriers. The problem we encountered was that we were reaching a volume where message delivery was being slowed by the carriers or being blocked as spam. The carriers were simply running out of bandwidth," says Ross.

Then NY-ALERT started using SAP SMS 365. "We have an SAP SMS 365 aggregator at our main data center in Albany and a backup in a second, secure location. Both are Tier 1 aggregators that manage the flow of messages to the carriers so that we never flood them with more messages than they can send at once. SAP SMS 365 also tells us when there are outages and, if so, can dynamically switch between carriers. SAP SMS 365 was crucial to enabling us to weather – no pun intended – this winter's storms and process the massive number of messages," explains Ross.

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Achieving concrete benefits

Besides the volume of SMS messages it can handle, SAP SMS 365 can let NY-ALERT know right away if an SMS message was delivered to AT&T or T-Mobile users. This eliminates all doubt about delivery for the team behind the scenes at NY-ALERT.

"Another thing we like is the speed at which SAP SMS 365 handles two-way SMS messages. This is helpful because NY-ALERT is more of a conduit for the 'notifiers,' that is, the agencies and school districts sending the alerts. Once they publish a message on our system, it doesn't get approved by us – it's gone," says Ross.

SAP SMS 365 lets those agencies get immediate feedback. For example, if the City University of New York sends out a text to notify that colleges are closed for the day, it can get an immediate reply from students, for example, if they are wondering which schools are closed. This knowledge helps the school craft a better, more informative second message. With Tier 2 and Tier 3 aggregators, there's more potential for delay.

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Adding more services

Ross looks at the future with SAP: "With the help of SAP SMS 365, we are working on adding multi-media messaging service [MMS] to our next version of NY-ALERT. MMS will let us embed photos for missing-child alerts or, down the road, maps of traffic congestion and detours. Or for special-needs populations, we could send messages as audio .wav files via MMS instead of straight texts. We are also working on iPhone and Windows Mobile apps for subscribers as well as notifiers. These will all become more popular along with 4G technology."

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