

Case Study: InformaCast® Solution

University-Wide Crisis Communications System

- **INDUSTRY**
Higher Education
- **CHALLENGE**
The need for a reliable emergency broadcast system with public address capabilities, simple enough for potential use by an array of individuals
- **SOLUTION**
Implementation of InformaCast paging software, ready out-of-the-box but tailorable to specific university needs
- **BENEFITS**
 - Ease of installation and use
 - Ready to go out of the box
 - Complete control in message content, scheduling, and destination
 - Usable for campus-wide or building-specific broadcasts
 - Able to broadcast to diverse modalities, including overhead IP speakers and IP phones



The Client

Brandeis University, a leading university outside of Boston with a total student enrollment of approximately 6,000 and about 1,000 faculty members.

The Business Challenge

In the wake of the tragedy at Virginia Tech in April 2007, universities across the country were confronted with the need for an improved method of all-campus communication. Brandeis University didn't waste any time. Their Crisis Communications Team immediately began to seek out the best solution for their campus.

John Turner, Brandeis' Director of Networks and Systems remembers that parents were asking a lot of questions: "What are you doing for communication? How are you going to let us know? How are you going to let our son or daughter know in case of a crisis? What other mechanisms do you have?"

As additional analysis of the Virginia Tech occurrence became available, reports and assessments pointed to the critical nature of a public address, or PA, system. Brandeis had recently deployed approximately 5,000 Cisco IP phones across the campus. Dormitory rooms, for example, had been equipped with one phone per resident, providing an ideal foundation for PA messaging. For this reason, says Turner, "We pretty much looked at InformaCast from day one." The Crisis Communications Team realized that with nearly all the major components already in place, they

could effectively implement InformaCast with minimal cost and no system disruption.

"The surprise in implementation of the system," notes Turner, "was the ease of doing it. It was: download the software, get a license key, get a server, point it at our CallManager infrastructure, and we were done. We were up and running in, really, I would say less than four hours."

Leveraging Berbee's Expertise

For the Brandeis Crisis Communications Team, two of InformaCast's most attractive aspects were its simplicity and its immediate readiness. Asserts Turner, "If we need to send a building specific alert, we can do that. We can do that today. We don't have to think about any initial programming. It doesn't require us to even look inside the CallManager system. Its something that [InformaCast] can just do right out of the box."

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Brandeis University

Technology

The Berbee-implemented solution included:

- InformaCast® Software
- IP Speakers

- **About Berbee**
Headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. Since 1993, Berbee Information Networks has delivered technology solutions that drive bottom line results for our clients. Our entrepreneurial spirit and values guide us, and we continue to set the standard for uncompromising customer support and technical leadership.
- **Why Berbee**
Berbee provides a one-stop shop for design, implementation, and support services for IP telephony. We provide our clients with ways to reduce the cost and complexity of their computing infrastructure so financial resources and personnel are freed up for more strategic initiatives.
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However, the solution could also be tailored to meet the specific needs and requirements of the Brandeis campus. “We actually had some development ideas...a few things that weren’t built into the product that we were looking to potentially leverage—things like our LDAP directory structure on campus. We were looking to create a crisis communications dashboard...a single point where you can issue a single message to seven different modalities,” Turner relates. Berbee was not only open to working with Brandeis to accomplish this fine-tuning, they jumped right on board. “It was really an enjoyable experience. It was a partnership. It wasn’t, ‘Well, you bought the product. You figure it out.’ It’s very much a partnership between the university and the folks at Berbee.

Results: A Reliable, Powerful, and Versatile Crisis Communications System

“When there’s an emergency, the Crisis Communication Teams need to just be able to issue the alerts on their own,” Turner insists. “Looking at the simplicity of what [InformaCast] had to offer, we knew that this was a solution that could be implemented by a wide variety of folks from the officer on duty all the way up to senior executives at the university.”

Turner additionally notes how reassuring it has been to be able to say to students’ parents, “Look, we have seven modalities of communication. One of them is a giant speaker outside and [another] is 5,000 speaker-phones on campus.” He adds, “And I think that the students, in fact, feel like, ‘Wow. If there is something, there is going to be a way. I’m not going to miss this. They’re going to find me somehow. There’s one of seven ways they can reach me, and I’m going to get the message.’ It

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definitely gives me the peace of mind—and I know our Crisis Communications Team the peace of mind—that we have something in place that we can deploy when we need it.”

While Turner had experienced no doubts that InformaCast could do what Brandeis required, he observes that the speed and ease of the deployment still surprised the Crisis Communications Team. “They were like, ‘Wow! This is the right solution. There’s no muss, no fuss. We have what we need. All-campus communications - done.”

