When disaster strikes, will you be ready?

5 steps to keep your organization safe in an emergency

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Keep your job and your cool in an emergency situation

Whether you are evaluating an emergency notification system for the first time or looking for ways to improve your existing strategy and business continuity, these five steps will help prepare your organization to better handle unplanned events.

5 steps to keep your business and team connected and safe

(!) When disaster strikes, you need to be able to communicate with everyone in your organization quickly, effectively, and collaboratively. From on-site emergencies to weather situations, IT outages to urgent corporate communications, today's businesses face countless potential disruptions. You must keep both people and data safe when – not if – they occur.

Streamlined communication is especially important in our multi-channel world. The days when every employee spent all day at his or her desk are long gone. Our systems, data, and people are now widely distributed, which makes a smart, reliable mass notification process more critical, and challenging, than ever.

Guarantee you can communicate with everyone at a moment's notice

1

The ability to quickly and reliably reach every one of your employees is the cornerstone of an emergency notification strategy. Unplanned business disruptions take many forms. In severe weather, like a snow storm, flooding, tornado, or earthquake, you may need to tell everyone to stay home, or to send them home and make sure they arrrived there safely. In a safety emergency, such as a shooter on campus, you need to evacuate fast and confirm your team members' whereabouts. In less dire circumstances, such as an IT outage, effective company-wide communication can get everyone informed and back to productivity as efficiently as possible.

> **!** While many organizations rely on email for emergency mass notifications, it is simply not enough.

If you lose power or the network goes down, email does too. If your employees are not at a computer or near their phones, if your distribution list is not up to date, if you don't have everyone's email addresses, your system fails. In an emergency, all of those "ifs" render email an unacceptable alternative. Phone trees, an even more outdated solution, also lack both the speed and precision required for business continuity today.

Be purpose built

To ensure that you can contact everyone quickly and efficiently, you should have a purpose-built emergency notification system that is independent of your infrastructure and built to handle today's many channels and devices quickly. Advances in technology make this easier than it sounds. Cloud-based systems deliver the performance, autonomy, and dependability you need, and are typically not cost-prohibitive, even to smaller organizations.

2 | Stay connected with two-way communication

Sending mass notifications during an unplanned event is only the first step. To ensure the safety and productivity of your employees, a two-way communication system is essential. Interactive processes send information both ways, so your crisis command center and your team members all remain updated and in contact. That means you gain complete confidence that you can always get in touch with your people.

Two-way communication allows you to confirm receipt of your message, and for recipients to reply. This ability plays a crucial role in crisis situations, in which you need to know who saw your message and who did not. It lets your students or employees tell you their status and easily provide a clear answer: Is your part of the building secure? Is your group of students safe? With this information, you can better prioritize resources during an emergency. Responders know where and on whom to focus their attention, and who is already safe and accounted for.

> ! **In business-critical situations, two-way communication helps your team get back to work quickly and re-establish business continuity.**

Can you hear me now?
Clear communication is key

You can require "read" receipts for things like executive memos or policy changes, ask if employees can get to a working space with WiFi during a system outage, or check on team members' local conditions during weather events.
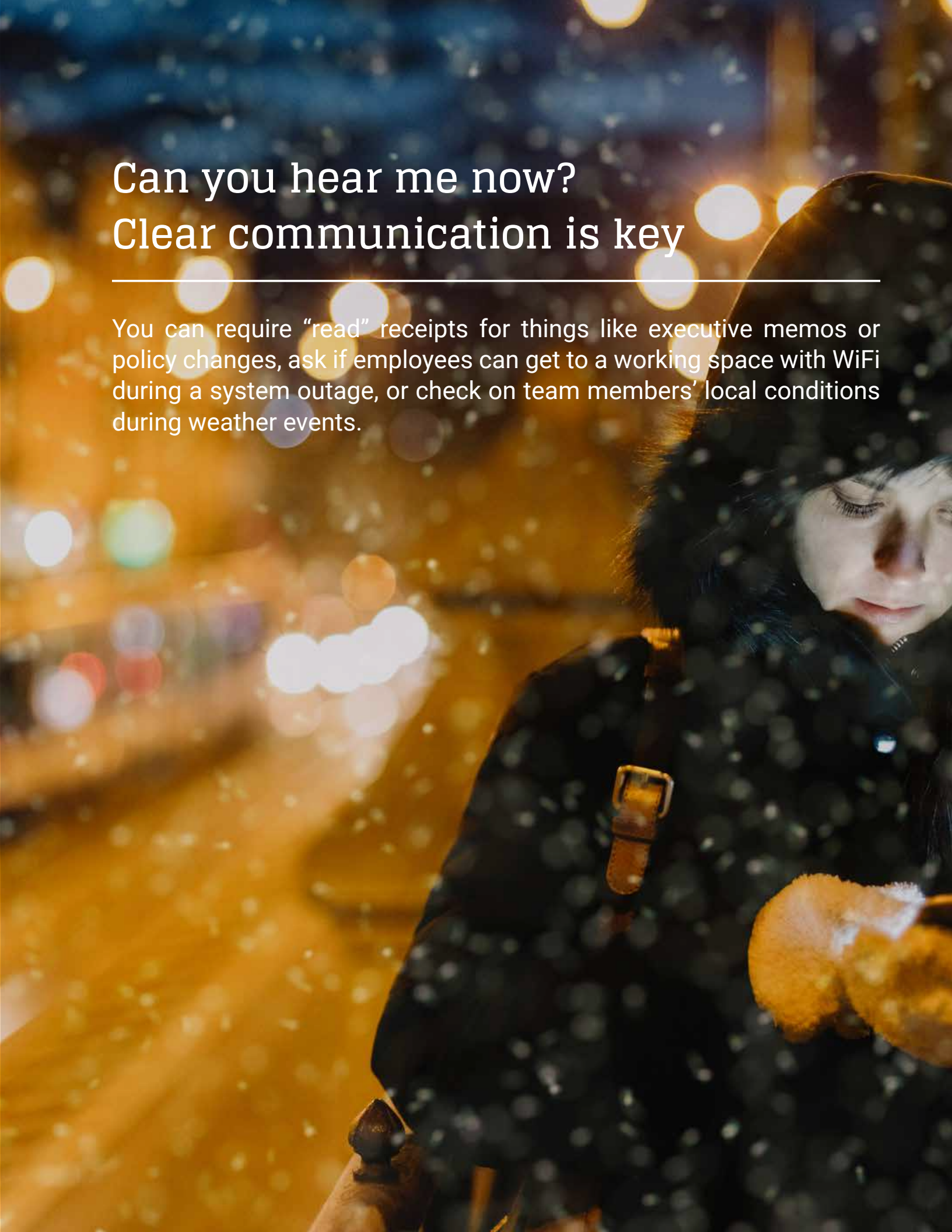
3

Reach your team where, and how, they prefer.

! In today's mobile society, no one relies on a single point of communication. When you need to reach your people, you need options: email, text, phone, social media, even pager and fax. Your emergency notification system should allow two-way communication to and from all of these channels.

Optimize your emergency mass notification processes by creating custom escalation paths that progress through channel options in the order you determine. During an unplanned event, for instance, you can tell the system to text first, and if you don't receive a response, move to phone, then email, then social media. This dramatically increases your chance of reaching your employees.

You can further focus your efforts by creating escalation paths specific to certain teams. You could create a process, for example, that calls all of your tech leads if your server goes down and automatically puts them all onto a conference call bridge together. Your team members each receive the call, press 1 to join, and are instantly connected. Escalation paths can progress through team members as well. If someone in marketing needs to know when an event occurs, start by calling Mary, if she doesn't answer, try John, and down through the ranks.

> **!** Encourage your employees to set their preferences within the system to make it even more effective and less intrusive.

With sophisticated emergency notification systems, individuals can not only designate their preferred channel (email me first, then call) but add parameters: email me first on Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm, but call me first at night and on the weekends. This ensures that people receive communications in the manner that they prefer, so you have a better chance of getting your message across faster and your employees are more likely to receive and respond to the message. Personalized notifications carry the added benefit of reducing redundant messages, so your people enjoy a positive user experience.
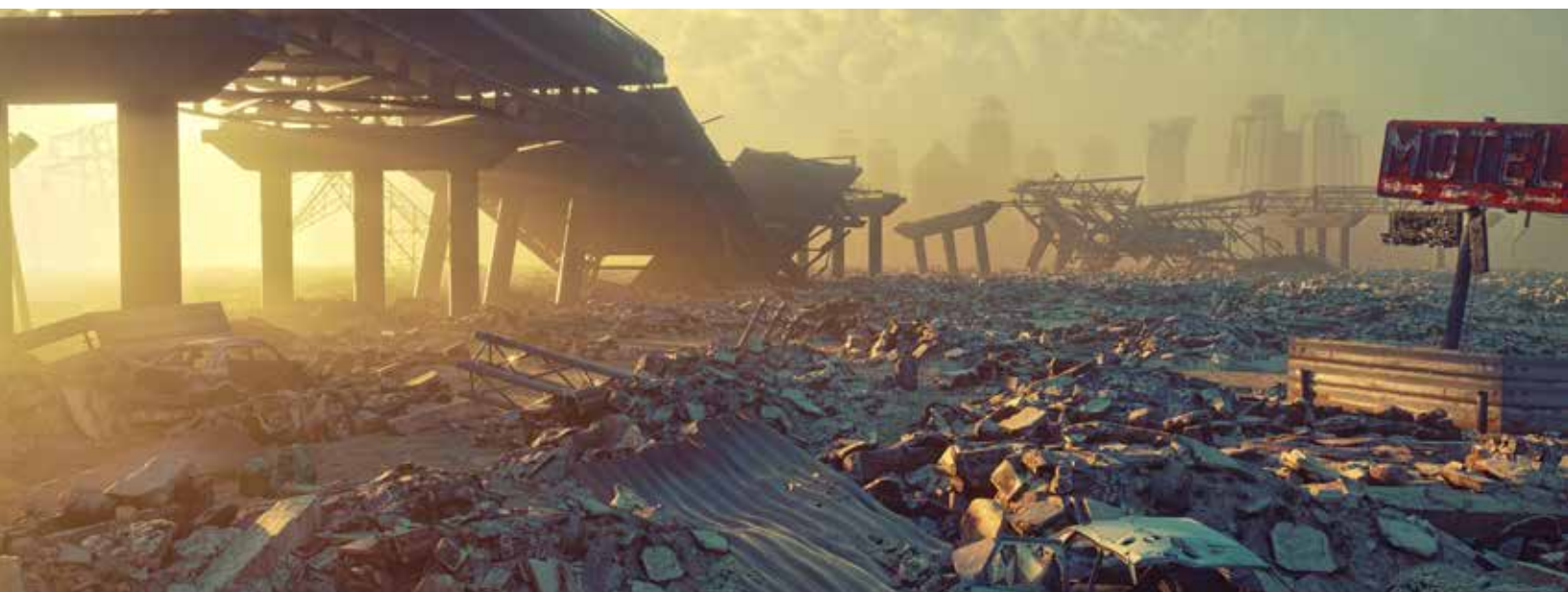
4

Make hotlines your lifelines

Take two-way communication even further with real-time hotlines. In an unplanned event, it's important to have an information "home base" that you can update quickly and easily and employees can access on their time table. Many mass notification systems allow you to set up a hotline directly from your phone. You can launch a pre-recorded message with one click, record a new message, or type your message to be read by the system using text-to-speech recognition.

> **!** A hotline increases efficiency during a crisis by establishing "pull" communication alongside your push notifications.

Your team members can come to you for information when they need it. This minimizes disruption to your workforce while continuing to ensure the delivery of your message.
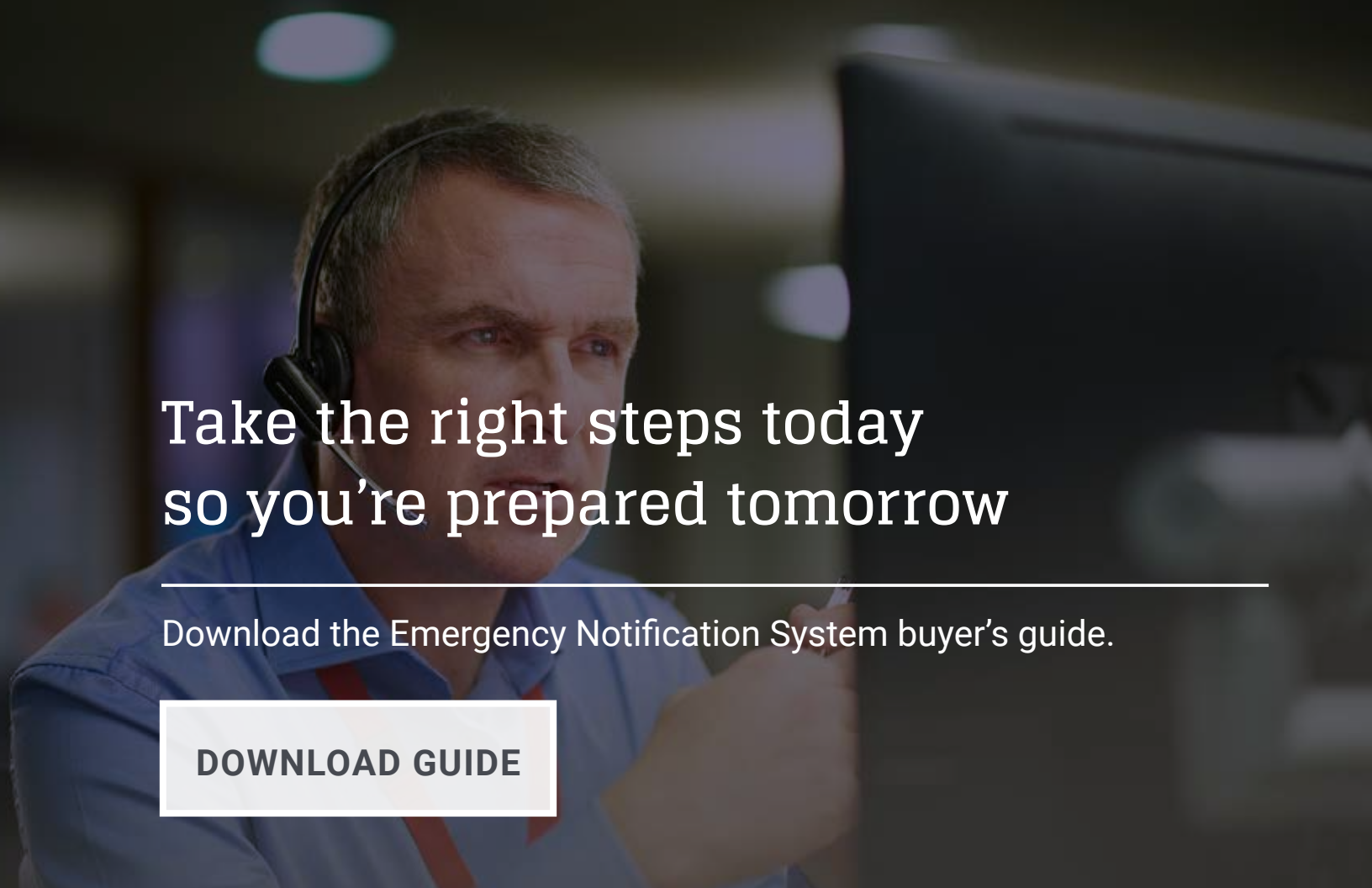
5 Connect with people and systems

Emergency notification systems rely on both breadth and depth of data to communicate efficiently with your team. Maximize the system's capability by integrating it with your existing IT infrastructure. While manual processes and escalation paths are a huge improvement over outdated notification methods like email, an integrated emergency notification system delivers even greater ease and benefit.

! Choose an emergency notification system with an open API that can integrate with Active Directory or directly with your HR system.

At a bare minimum, you should at least be able to update your employees' or students' information using CSV files. You can also use your mass notification system itself to populate its database, emailing your team members until they have added their information and preferences. You may currently only have your users' email addresses, but in this way you can build a robust communication plan in as little as 30 days.

With this data, you have endless options for customization. Use geofencing to target people only in a specific area; some systems connect to Google Maps so you can draw a shape and message everyone in that area.

Take the right steps today
so you're prepared tomorrow

Download the Emergency Notification System buyer's guide.

DOWNLOAD GUIDE

Apply rules so that only people in certain groups receive a message about a new corporate policy that applies just to them. Highly targeted communications reduce administrative burden, increase the efficiency of your mass notification processes, and improve the user experience. Messaging the right people, at the right time, means no one receives irrelevant communications and no one is unnecessarily alarmed.

Ensure that your emergency notification system is powerful enough for your needs by evaluating its level of granularity. A simple to use interface is certainly important, but when your employees' or students' lives are at stake, you need the data and processing power to communicate with people as quickly and efficiently as possible.

For businesses large and small, emergency notification systems are no longer a nice-to-have. Implement the steps above to guarantee the safety of your people and continuity of your business when an unplanned event occurs.

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