

Ouachita Baptist University

Ouachita Baptist University uses Singlewire InformaCast for campus-wide emergency communication.

Industry

Higher Education

Challenge

The need for a reliable emergency broadcast system text and audio message 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
- 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, IP phones, text messages and email

The Client

Ouachita Baptist University is a private liberal arts university in Arkadelphia, AR. Currently, the school educates approximately 1,500 students, most of whom live in on-campus housing.

The Business Challenge

Like many universities, Ouachita Baptist University (OBU) started their search for a campus-wide communication system after the tragedy at Virginia Tech in April, 2007. IT Services at OBU knew they wanted a solution that included an audible component. Rob Crockett, Network Administrator at OBU, explained that it would be unwise to rely solely on text messages, emails, or their school's webpage for transmitting information, as not everyone is at their computers at all times. "We could send messages, but we don't have a way to know if it is actually going to get to the phone once it leaves our network," said Crockett, "We needed to build a layered system. We didn't need to rely on just one aspect. We needed to rely on many aspects."

OBU's IT Services team also decided that their future system should be simple enough for anybody to use, but at the same time, with just a couple of clicks, notification would be sent out to a variety of endpoints. Crockett found Singlewire's (then Berbee) InformaCast application after the Vice President for Student Services made a suggestion of his own on the campus-wide communication system. "Our Vice President for Student Services asked us, 'Is there a way we can ring all the phones on our campus to alert people?'" At first, the IT Services team didn't think it was possible. "Then I was able to find InformaCast, and started looking into it, and I said, 'Yes, we can do what you are asking for,'" related Crockett.

Getting messages to student housing posed another challenge, as none of the on-campus residences were equipped with IP phones. With InformaCast, "we don't

"I would recommend it [InformaCast] to other universities, and I have."

Rob Crockett
Network Administrator - IT Services
Ouachita Baptist University

have to have a phone,” explains Crockett. “We can have zone controllers, and we can put them wherever we want to and put speakers on them. That was very appealing to us at the time, especially when we knew that the audible [method of communication] was one of the easiest ways to actually get somebody’s attention—that is what you are trying to do in an emergency: get somebody’s attention.”

The Four-phase Solution

After conducting extensive research, the OBU IT Services team created a custom, four-phase solution that would allow them to meet all their communication and mass notification challenges: the Ouachita Emergency Notification System. With the help of InformaCast OBU now had an emergency communication system that was simple enough for anyone to use, could ring all the phones on campus, and send messages to a variety of endpoints including speakers, text messages, and email.

In Phase I, administrators use InformaCast to send out either a pre-recorded messages to the entire campus or only a select area. They simply select the message they want to send and the areas to which to send it—all from a single screen.

“Phase II of the [Emergency Notification System] has the ability to post updates to the web, email messages, and text messages, along with instructions on how to do an ad-hoc message from an IP phone,” explains Crockett. “Phase III is where we can send an all-clear alert. Phase IV is where we can wrap up the emergency and the web alerts are removed. We package up the logs and save them for any information that may be needed later with time stamps of what we did during the emergency.”

“This was a custom built solution with the added feature of InformaCast,” remarks Crockett. “We are very proud of the system and of our partnership with Singlewire.”

OBU also uses Singlewire’s Direct Observation and Real-Time Alerting (DORA) application, which expands the notification capabilities of InformaCast, as a part of the fire alarm system in their four newest student residences.

“In those four buildings, we are able to notify the residents through the fire alarm system as there are speakers in every room and every public area.... We are able to tap into that and send whatever message we are needing to send out,” says Crockett. DORA expands the capabilities of the InformaCast paging applications by allowing them to integrate

A Test of the Emergency Notification System

On August 24, 2010, OBU’s emergency communication solution was put to the test when police notified the administration that an armed robbery suspect had run onto their campus.

“Once [the Vice President for Student Services] understood the situation at hand, he was able to send the alert from his computer,” remarks Crockett. “He was able to send an audible message with InformaCast. He was able to [send] text messages. He was able to change our webpage, and send emails to all students, faculty, and staff.”

Ouachita Baptist University currently relies on InformaCast in emergency situations only. They have pre-defined scripts that can send out pre-recorded emergency messages for events like tornadoes or a fire. “During the emergency the other day, we have a pre-recorded [message] for a possible violent situation—that’s what was sent out. We then followed it up with ad-hoc messages to tell people that they need to go indoors. And, we continued to remind people during the crisis that they need to stay indoors.”

The result was a comprehensive and efficient emergency communication to the entire campus. “It worked very successfully,” said Crockett of the Emergency Notification System. “We were able to do a complete lockdown on our whole campus within about five minutes of initiating the alert to people.”

About Singlewire

Singlewire Software develops and supports innovative voice applications centered around secure, fast, and reliable mass notification capabilities. Our main application offerings: InformaCast, PushToTalk, and DORA allow our customers unprecedented control in designing mass notifications, assigning them to specific recipients, and determining the medium for dissemination—IP phones, IP speakers, email, etc.—all with the peerless capacity for customization to our customers’ specific environments. Singlewire is devoted to maintaining the agility and imagination needed to fulfill our customers’ needs and fostering an environment for successful partnerships between our customers and our company.