InformaCast Helps Oregon Community College Protect Commuter Students

The Challenge

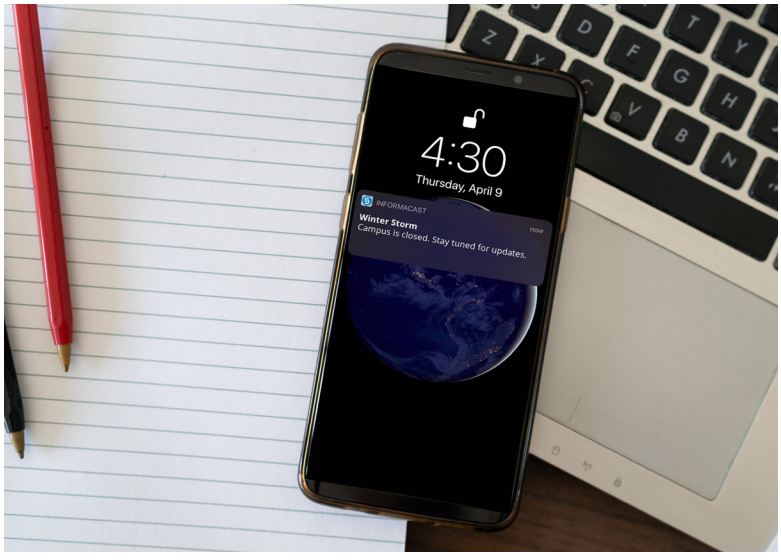
Clatsop Community College in Northwest Oregon needed a way to reach its entire population of commuter students with critical information about campus operations. Without a single, unified system for sending alerts, college administrators struggled to ensure that everyone was receiving the information they needed when normal operations were interrupted.

The Solution

The college implemented InformaCast, a cloud-based mass notification system, to deliver SMS text, email, and audio messages directly to students on their mobile devices whenever an issue arises. Throughout campus, InformaCast is also connected to desk phones, digital signage, and desktop computers to broadcast alerts giving Clatsop the best chance of reaching its entire community with the vital details they need to stay informed.

Severe Weather Puts Commuter Students at Risk

In the Pacific Northwest, unpredictable weather means colleges need to be prepared for anything that might disrupt normal operations. At Clatsop Community College, located in Astoria, Ore. near the mouth of the Columbia River, Tom Ank, chief information security manager, knew that college officials struggled to communicate with students and staff when severe weather closed the campus. With a large commuter population and threats like ice storms, freezing rain, snow, and severe thunderstorms that can produce high winds and even waterspouts on the nearby river, Ank needed to be able to alert everyone when decisions were made that impacted the college's operating hours.



"Being able to reach the entire campus community is what we're after," said Ank. "We don't want our students traveling in dangerous conditions just to arrive at the college and find it closed."

But achieving that goal is easier said than done. With over 1,000 students and 150 staff to reach across a main campus with seven buildings and two additional satellite campuses, Clatsop needed a simple solution to instantly get information into the hands of the people who needed it as quickly as possible.

Reaching Students with Text, Audio, and Visuals

The college implemented InformaCast, a mass notification and incident management solution from Singlewire Software to help expand the reach of its critical messages and unify communications through a single platform. InformaCast is connected to existing technology on campus, including Yealink phones powered by Microsoft Teams, digital signage, and desktop computers located in classrooms. This enables the college to deliver intrusive text, audio, and visual messages the moment an issue arises, so students and staff can stop what they are doing, understand what's happening, and take appropriate action.

While being able to alert people that are on campus is a must, it was equally important to reach commuter students who may be off campus. Through InformaCast, Clatsop is able to deliver mobile notifications that reach students directly. Every student and staff member is automatically enrolled to receive InformaCast notifications via email, and they have the option to receive notifications via text and phone calls as well. Multiple alerting methods help ensure everyone receives the message and sees it quickly so people don't leave their homes during hazardous conditions unnecessarily.

"Our main goal is to make sure people know what's happening," said Ank. "If we can give them the information they need in a way that makes it likely that will see it quickly, it can help avoid a lot of headaches."

Multiple alerting methods also help Clatsop meet ADA requirements with messages that can be seen and heard, emphasizing the urgency of the situation.

Flexibility Keeps Operations Running Smoothly

InformaCast's flexibility has been a key component in Clatsop's success. Not only can students choose how to receive alerts, but administrators are able to activate alerts from anywhere, with a single push of a button.

"I don't need to be in my office in front of a desk to send out these alerts," said Ank. "I can wake up and launch them from home, enabling me to provide more immediate notice to our community when we need to close."

That flexibility extends to communications the college is able to send using InformaCast. While primary uses have centered around sending alerts for severe weather and campus closings, it also has messages prepared for violent situations that would require people to shelter in place and has been used for less serious, but still disruptive situations.

"We had a boiler that went down in one of our buildings, which meant there was no heat," said Ank. "With InformaCast, we were able to alert students and let them know they should bring a jacket to class that day."

Backend analytics also enable Ank and his team to see the effectiveness of InformaCast so they can understand that messages are being delivered as intended. It's part of the reason InformaCast has become an invaluable component of the college's communication strategy and why it's used frequently to share information with its community.

"What colleges often overlook when considering mass notification solutions like InformaCast is that it doesn't need to be a tool that only gets used when an emergency occurs," said Ank. "We use it primarily as a communications tool, which has allowed us to get more value out of it because we are able to stay more connected to our students and staff with regular communications."

For more information about how InformaCast mass notification can help enhance safety and communication at your college, visit www.singlewire.com/informacast-higher-education.