InformaCast Helps Locate Lost Children During Community Events

The Challenge

The organizers of Freedom Fest in Morgan Hill, Calif. were looking to enhance their communication beyond their repeater-based radio system to help reach all their volunteers with critical information about emergencies to help protect the people in attendance.

The Solution

Freedom Fest organizers turned to InformaCast to send mass text messages to volunteers and first responders to help streamline communications, manage emergency events, and combat misinformation.

Establishing More Effective Communication

In Santa Clara County, the community of Morgan Hill, Calif. hosts Freedom Fest, one of the nation's longest-running Fourth of July celebrations. Over the course of two days, more than 45,000 visitors come to enjoy a parade, fireworks, car show, and other family-oriented activities. It takes hundreds of volunteers to ensure these events run smoothly and that everyone stays safe. As planning began for the 2022 celebration, Matthew Stein, President of Freedom Fest, knew there was an opportunity for his team to communicate more effectively.

"We have 300 radios out in the field helping to connect and organize police, fire, medics, security, and volunteers," said Stein. "However, it is almost impossible to verify who is speaking over the radio when an emergency occurs. As threats have increased and issues with misinformation have arisen, it became evident that we needed a reliable source of information that people could trust to understand when a threat was real and when it was a false alarm."

Stein and his team began looking at mass text messaging tools to add another layer of verifiable communication that could be used to reach everyone with details about an incident. What he found were free solutions that had severe limitations that restricted their usefulness.

"We have volunteers that range in age from 14 to 70," explained Stein. "We needed something simple enough to be used quickly and easily in the event of an emergency, but offered the features necessary for us to reach the right people with the right information at the right time."

In his professional life, Stein was familiar with InformaCast, a mass notification platform that offered mass text messaging capabilities, and worked with the team at Singlewire Software to leverage it for Freedom Fest.

Locating Lost Children

While it is impossible to predict what may happen at an event like Freedom Fest, Stein and his team prepared for several situations. Using the Command Center feature in InformaCast, Stein created scenarios for fires, evacuations, lost children, medical events, updating staff and leadership with general information, and an all clear. Stein and the head of safety had the InformaCast app on their phones which allowed them to access these scenarios and send text messages to volunteers who had already been enrolled to receive alerts. If an incident occurred, all members were alerted audibly via the radio, which served as a signal that they should check their phones for more details. During the parade on the morning of July 4th, Stein's planning was put into practice.

"We started getting reports via 911 and from our safety marshal that there was a lost three-year-old child," said Stein. "Using InformaCast we sent out a message with a description of the child to all of our volunteers and staff."

One of the volunteers who received the notification had just finished moving water barriers that were protecting the parade route, saw the child, who had traveled more than a block away from their mother. The volunteer secured the child the reunited them with their mother.

"During the fireworks later that evening, we had another incident involving a lost child," Stein said. "The noise generated by the fireworks made it challenging to use the radios, and the lack of visibility at that time of night and a crowd of 10,000 people made searching challenging. We sent text messages out immediately via InformaCast with a description."

The fireworks ended soon after the initial alert went out, and a security guard spotted the child, helping reunite them with their parents.

"In prior years it has taken us 15-17 minutes to locate and reunite a lost child," Stein said. "This year with InformaCast, that time was cut down to around five minutes."

The Importance of "All Clear" Messages

Beyond the alerting benefits, Stein points to InformaCast's ability to help limit disinformation and send out all clear messages as big advantages.

"In previous years we've had to overcome sorting out multiple reports coming from calls and verbal accounts to ascertain the truth of what was happening," said Stein. "In fact, when the child was lost during the parade, we needed to determine if it was a single child missing or two. Now we were able to do that in two minutes and then communicate the correct information out to our volunteers which helped speed up the time it took to locate the child."

When each incident was over, Stein was also able to send out "all clear" messages. This helped let people know the incident had been resolved, cutting down on redundant or repetitive radio chatter, and allowing everyone to move on and focus on the next stage of the event.

"Thanks to InformaCast and our volunteers we were able to run a successful and safe event," said Stein. "The mass notification capabilities it offers made it easy to reach everyone with accurate information to quickly resolve incidents and maintain calm."

Visit www.singlewire.com/informacast for more information about how InformaCast mass notification can help spread the word during emergencies, leading to quicker response times and more successful outcomes.