

# Best Practices for Mass Communication in Healthcare



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## Executive Summary

Mass communication systems are gradually becoming commonplace in most healthcare organizations across the globe. With the advent of mobile technology and an increasingly connected workforce, employees are learning to utilize these systems, originally intended for emergency notification, to lower costs through increased day-to-day operational efficiencies.

Whether utilizing the system to enhance code calling and STEMI alerts with multiple contact paths, allowing ER Charge nurses to quickly and efficiently communicate with their staff to fill open shifts and automate staffing processes, or communicating across multiple facilities in the case of a regional emergency or natural disaster, healthcare organizations are increasing their use of mass notification systems for critical communications.

In this paper, Everbridge has brought together several of its most progressive users to share their insight, expertise, and several industry best practices that can be utilized by every healthcare organization.

**Stephen Monteiro**, Capacity and Emergency Management Director at Boston Children's Hospital, manages the mass communication system for the world-renowned 395 bed comprehensive care center for pediatric care.

**Tim Klippert**, Emergency Preparedness Manager at University of Colorado Health, uses mass notification across multiple facilities at the highest-performing academic hospital in the United States.

**Kelby Hill**, Preparedness Coordinator at Texas Trauma Service Area G Piney Woods RAC, manages the top-down functionality of their mass communication system across all RAC area hospitals.

## Accelerating code-calls and operational communications

Code calling and STEMI alerts are common ways to communicate critical and time-sensitive information in healthcare settings. Traditionally communicated through pagers and PA systems, modern technology has afforded organizations additional and often more efficient ways to broadcast this vital information.

When selecting a mass communication system for a healthcare organization, it is important to ensure that it supports multiple contact pathways, including mobile voice, landline, SMS, pagers, email, social media, and more to ensure that the information gets to the desired individuals as quickly as possible.

“At RAC-G, we regularly use our mass notification system to quickly communicate color-coded events and STEMI alerts to all key personnel. Additionally, we have found that the multiple contact paths and easy group building capabilities allow us to effectively organize meetings, whether planned or unplanned,” said Kelby Hill of RAC-G.

Mass communication can easily increase efficiencies and reduce time required (and therefore costs) for operational procedures. Whether organizing meetings on the fly or communicating the initiation of key operational procedures in mere minutes, a robust system with two-way communication capabilities can provide increased ROI on a daily basis.

“During a critical power failure in our region, we utilized our mass communication system to quickly gather all key personnel into a single location to mitigate the situation. Without a mass communication system, we may not have been able to gather all the required employees in an unplanned meeting on short notice. By being able to assemble these people so quickly, we were able to easily disseminate information that lead to the successful management of what could have been a crisis situation,” said Stephen Monteiro of Boston Children’s Hospital.

## Quickly filling shifts with qualified staff

Manually staffing in a healthcare setting can be slow and frustrating. Traditionally, staffing operations require the consideration of complicated requirements to dictate which employees may take or not take an open shift. With a robust mass communication system, this entire process can be automated, and the employees responsible for staffing operations are able to complete the process quickly and efficiently, saving time and money.

“Our system was initially deployed to communicate with our entire employee base in the event of large-scale incidents such as severe weather disasters and regional emergencies. We’ve found it is equally useful in our everyday staffing operations. Every ER Charge nurse on our team is trained on the system, and it can be used on the fly to fill open shifts or positions in critical areas such as ER staffing,” said Tim Klippert of University of Colorado Health.

“Whether we are using Everbridge for staffing purposes or operational uses, the system allows our member hospitals to manage their operations independently, while still granting us the ability to seamlessly communicate with all of them in the event of a large-scale crisis,” said Kelby Hill of RAC-G. “We’ve already deployed across a majority of our facilities in the RAC region. It is our goal to strengthen and enhance our capabilities to protect and care for the people of Texas in regards to responding to large-scale emergencies.”

## Communicating critical information during emergencies

Emergency notification is often the driving purpose behind the acquisition of mass communication systems, though this is rapidly shifting as organizations realize the potential operational benefits of these platforms. Still, emergency situations are often one of the most critical uses of mass notification and interactive communication systems. They allow the rapid and efficient broadcast of critical information to key personnel in dangerous situations and crises.

During the second wave of the H1N1 (commonly known as “Swine Flu”) crises, Boston Children’s Hospital was faced with a unique situation that required a rapid and strategically timed response for which their mass communication system offered the perfect solution. It was proven that the children that were most at risk of contracting the illness were those who had already been sick or hospitalized. Due to an unexpected prioritization from the state, Boston Children’s Hospital was suddenly granted a large portion of the available vaccines.

“In order to get these vaccines to the people who needed them most, we devised a unique strategy based around mass communication. We ran a filter through our record keeping system that extracted the phone numbers of the parents or guardians of at-risk children without revealing any personal information. We then easily and quickly inputted that information into our mass communication platform and grouped the contacts into waves. By sending out notifications of the available vaccines at our 'Just-In-Time' flu clinic in waves, we not only got the vaccine to the people who needed it most, but we were able to do it in a way that did not overwhelm our staff or capacity for treating these individuals,” said Stephen Monteiro of Boston Children’s Hospital.

## Reporting and analytics

Modern mass communication systems should come with advanced reporting and analytics features. These not only allow administrators to review and analyze the success and key areas of improvement for broadcasts, but additionally grants organizations the ability to report on their communication practices for purposes of compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.

When broadcasting information to employees in a healthcare organization, it is often critical to get confirmation that the message has been received, and the critical information has been successfully communicated.

“Another key item to consider is the idea of accountability. Through our reporting and analytics capabilities and confirmation of message receipt, we make our employees accountable for their responses. This helps guarantee a response if we are sending a polling notification (What is your estimated time of arrival?, etc.) and increases our response rate by a very large factor. Additionally, if we ever have a poor result from a broadcast, we can turn to the reporting and analytics feature to answer the question: Why?” said Kelby Hill of RAC-G.

## Monitoring social media activity for situational intelligence

In many incidents during the past year, breaking news has spread across social networks before any other traditional communication pathway. Social media usage is growing exponentially, with users over 50 years old being the fastest growing demographic after a near saturation among younger age groups. Social media is certainly a valuable tool that can be harnessed to great benefit. However, it is a significant force in public opinion and the spread of information, and if it is ignored, can become a liability to your organization. The general population now expects real-time news with updates throughout an event.

Ignoring social media won't *always* cause harm; however, there are incidents in which harnessing the information it can provide would greatly improve situational, real-time intelligence. One large hospital recently experienced an unexpected surge of visitors, crowding emergency rooms and reception areas, complete with local news helicopters hovering the sky.

Unfortunately for hospital officials, they had no idea why their hospital had just become so crowded with people who seemed not to need any medical care. This complicated their ability to continue to provide services as expected; however, this was an unnecessary and potentially dangerous distraction. If they had been properly monitoring social media and filtering the data, they would have seen the rumors circulating that a celebrity was planning to visit the victims of the Aurora movie theater shooting hours in advance and been able to properly prepare for the surge in visitors.

Additionally, monitoring social media can give organization officials the ability to mitigate and derail any untrue rumors or misinformation that spreads through avenues such as Twitter.

“We see great value in being able to monitor social media to ensure that the proper information is being communicated to the public, especially in the incident of an emergency or pandemic of any sort,” said Stephen Monteiro of Boston Children’s Hospital. “Additionally, it allows us to gauge whether or not our critical and strategic PR efforts are penetrating and getting to the public at large during important incidents.”

## Conclusion

Mass communication systems are gradually becoming valuable assets for a growing number of healthcare organizations across the globe. With new capabilities and an increasingly connected workforce, employees are learning to utilize these systems to lower costs through increased day-to-day operational efficiencies.

Whether utilizing the system to enhance code calling and STEMI alerts with multiple contact paths, allowing ER Charge nurses to quickly and efficiently communicate with their staff to fill open shifts and automate staffing processes, or communicating across multiple facilities in the case of a regional emergency or natural disaster, healthcare organizations are increasing their use of mass notification systems for critical communications in several key areas.

Through the use of these mass notification and interactive communication systems, healthcare organizations are modernizing their operations, creating accountability, and lowering costs through increased daily operational efficiencies.



## About Everbridge

Everbridge provides industry-leading interactive communication and mass notification solutions to organizations in all major industries and government sectors.

Communication failures have historically plagued organizations in their ability to respond to and minimize the human, operational, and financial impact of critical events and emergency incidents. Everbridge began with a shared vision: empowering a single person to communicate with any number of people as easily as communicating with one person to save lives, protect assets, minimize loss, and ensure continuity of operations. Everbridge brings technology and expertise together at every level for a complete solution. Everbridge solutions match your unique needs, from safety and survival during a crisis to cutting costs and achieving efficiencies in your everyday operations. Our understanding of mass notification and interactive communication challenges is leveraged in everything we do, from how we build our technology from the ground up to the expertise of the people we hire and best practices we share with the community.

We design the Everbridge system according to several key tenets:

- **Target the individual** – not the device. Everbridge has the most comprehensive notification system available, offering more than 30 contact paths that can be designated by incident type or by escalation steps.
- **Ease-of-use during any situation** – emergency or daily use – so even a non-technical person can communicate effortlessly and without anxiety.
- **Speed and reliability of communications.** Every second counts in an emergency. With global datacenters and an infrastructure unparalleled in security and reliability, the Everbridge mass notification system is designed for rapid and efficient communications worldwide so your message will always go through.
- **Universal accessibility** – with a fully managed system requiring no hardware, no software, no maintenance, and a flexible pay-as-you-grow model, organizations large and small have access to the same powerful communication capabilities.
- **Scalability** – the Everbridge mass notification system provides the ultimate flexibility in communication capabilities to meet changing needs in today's dynamic environment. The Everbridge system is inherently scalable to grow with and adjust to the requirements of any organization quickly and without disruption to internal processes, infrastructure, or resources.

Visit [www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com) to learn more.