

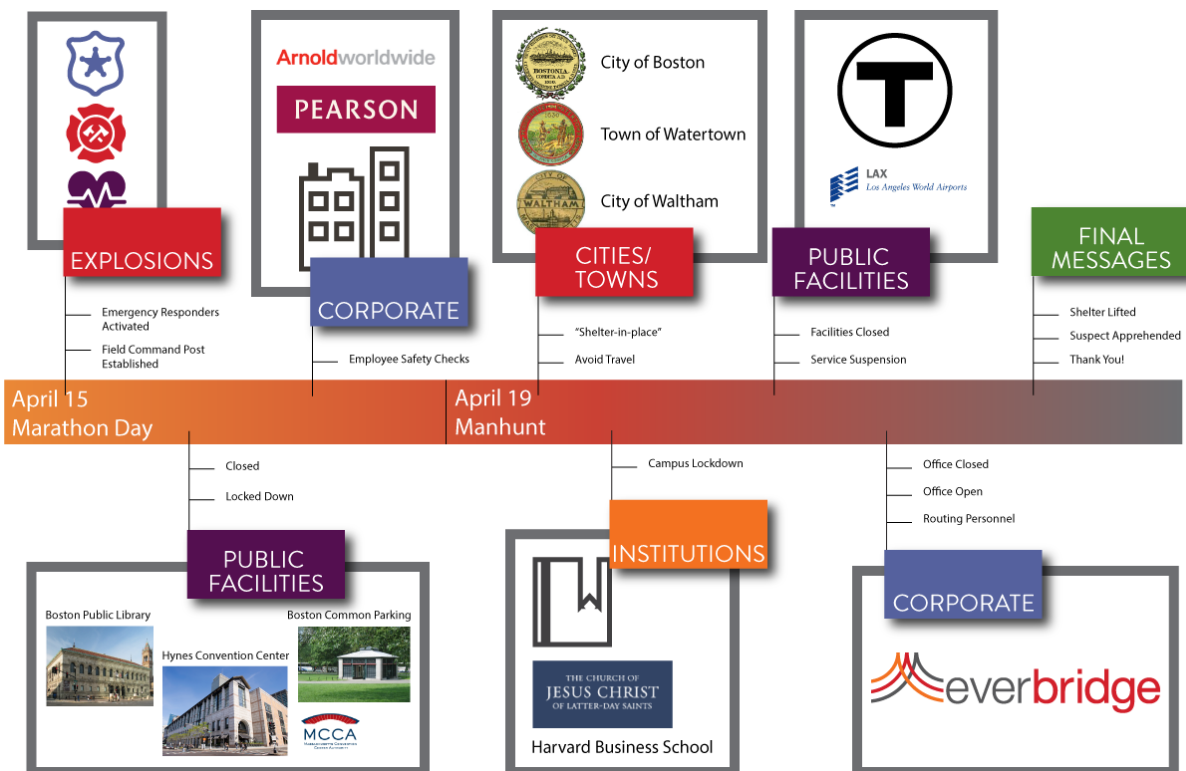
Learning from Boston

*Crisis communication during
terrorist attacks*



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Executive Summary

On Monday, April 15th, 2013, the City of Boston was attacked during the running of the 117th Boston Marathon. Following the attack, area police coordinated with the FBI for a week-long manhunt to find those responsible and bring them to justice.

Crisis communication played a pivotal role in the events that followed the explosions in downtown Boston, from the initial response to the eventual regional lock down and apprehension. While acts of violence are unfortunately increasing in frequency, preparation, planning, and swift response can minimize loss. What best practices can we learn from this tragic event?

Event timeline and communication strategies

On April 15, 2013, at 2:49 in the afternoon, two explosions rocked the finish line of the Boston Marathon. New England's most widely viewed sporting event, and the world's oldest annual marathon, the 2013 event attendance included 26,839 race entrants and more than 500,000 spectators. The two pressure-cooker bombs resulted in three fatalities and left over 250 people injured. On April 18, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released photographs and surveillance video of two suspects, one of whom would later be killed during an overnight shoot-out with police. In the ensuing manhunt for the second suspect, the authorities asked residents of Watertown and surrounding areas, including Boston, to stay indoors, or "shelter-in-place." On April 19, the suspect was discovered hiding in a boat in a Watertown backyard, and arrested.

Monday, April 15th

Two bombs explode on Boylston Street, near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. Three are killed and over 250 are injured. President Barack Obama says he does not know who was behind the attacks and orders the administration to provide whatever support necessary to Boston law enforcement and first responders.

Communication Strategy

The City of Boston and area businesses utilize mass notification systems to keep citizens, tourists, and employees safe and away from the area that was attacked. Many private corporations use their mass communication platform to confirm the safety of their local employees and identify any needs, while law enforcement uses their systems to keep spectators away and direct them out of the city.

At companies like Pearson, an education services firm with local offices, for example, critical communication software is used to gather the company's incident command team, responsible for implementing the company's safety plan, on a conference call. The group then notifies employees of what has happened, and verify the safety of those in their Boylston Street office.¹

¹ Ailworth, Erin. " Everbridge filled communications gap in blast." Boston Globe, April 18, 2013: <http://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2013/04/17/firm-system-got-out-word-marathon-bombing-when-cellphone-networks-crashed/KXfCDuWgtCDfCoulTAHiHJ/story.html>. Retrieved 8 Apr 2014.

Tuesday, April 16th

Doctors say the victims of the bombings were hit with intentionally placed shrapnel and pellets. Many emergency surgeries occur on patients who are in critical condition. President Obama calls the bombings an act of terror.

Communication Strategy

Local healthcare facilities pull in all available staff members via mass communication. Automated alerts practiced during emergency drills throughout the year are utilized to manage the large-scale response to the attack. Operating rooms are used around the clock, and surgeons and support staff are called in via mass communication through phone, text, email and push notification.

Thursday, April 18th

President Obama attends a special interfaith service at a Boston cathedral for all of those affected by the blasts.

Communication Strategy

Local law enforcement, working in concert with the FBI and Secret Service, manage the arrival and participation of President Obama in the special interfaith service. Road closures are announced to citizens of Boston as the presidential motorcade passes through and special security measures are broadcast through critical communication systems.

Friday, April 19th

A campus police officer is shot dead at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a shoot-out erupts with the suspected perpetrators of the attacks. Another police officer is injured. The city enters a lockdown. One of the two suspects is killed after a shootout with police in the Boston suburb of Watertown. A region-wide manhunt begins for the second suspect. All public transportation and livery services are shut down and the region is shut down. At 7:30pm, Boston Police announce that they have apprehended the second suspect and have him in custody following a stand-off.

Communication Strategy

One of the most wide-spread regional lockdowns in U.S. history is coordinated through mass communication platforms and social media. As the manhunt for the suspects is launched, Boston, Cambridge, Watertown, Waltham, Newton, and surrounding communities shut down public transportation. Within hours, citizens are sheltering in place with locked doors and windows, following instructions broadcast to their phones, mobile devices, tablets, and computers.

Strategic information made available on social networks is analyzed by law enforcement for relevant information. Following the successful apprehension of the surviving suspect, the region is notified through multiple devices and delivery methods.

The importance of interacting networks

The attacks in Boston affected thousands. Many of these individuals were Boston residents, employees of area businesses, or visiting from out of town. The critical communication strategy that touched these individuals and communicated important safety information came from many sources and networks.

While the City of Boston was communicating information to citizens (including some out of town visitors), private corporations were communicating with their employee base and race organizers were communicating with participants. With all of these networks interacting, overlapping, and communicating critical information as it became available, the public was more readily informed as the lifecycle of the incident progressed than ever before.

When the City of Boston executed its lockdown, area businesses were then able to use their own mass communication platforms to pass along the message to employees who may not be opted into The City of Boston's alerts. This network effect allowed information to pass to a much greater population, faster than traditionally possible before mass communication.

Results of communication strategies

The Boston bombing and the subsequent manhunt was one of the most technologically advanced responses to an attack on domestic soil in United States history. A wide array of technologies was utilized including facial recognition technology, social media monitoring and mass communication.

Following the bombing, local law enforcement and area organizations immediately communicated critical information to constituents not only to direct them to safety, but to provide a two-way channel for area employees to communicate that they were safe. Law enforcement then used mass communication after the incident to request video and photographic evidence from the witnesses of the event. Using this, along with monitoring social media and local security footage, they were able to quickly and definitively ascertain the identities of the prime suspects.

When the manhunt began Friday, law enforcement used mass communication to enact one of the most effective and immediate regional lock downs in history, minimizing the additional loss of life and property while keeping the streets empty and citizens safe. Meanwhile, area businesses used their mass notification platforms to alert employees of office closures and instruct them to stay at their homes instead of risking a potentially dangerous commute during the manhunt. These multiple networks expeditiously and effectively kept the population informed and safe during the duration of the event, limiting the exposure to additional loss of life or injury.

Best practices for crisis communication

One of the reasons the response by law enforcement and area organizations was so effective was their usage of best practices in mass communication for crisis response. In high stress situations, best practices become paramount for effective communication.

Develop and test a plan for clear communication

While disasters and crises can be, by their nature, difficult or impossible to predict, a great deal can be gained by trying to anticipate and plan for any possible event. By incorporating a crisis communication strategy into its operations, an organization can address some of the challenges of in-crisis communication and guide staff through disaster and recovery. Advance planning helps reduce the number of errors that happen under duress, and can help ensure that messages have been received and that the right processes are followed.

To develop a plan for clear communication, organizations should consider the following strategies:

Have a documented plan to address incidents, emergencies, and disasters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends that every organization should develop and implement an emergency plan for protecting employees, visitors, contractors, and anyone who could be affected by crises. This plan should also include contingencies for building evacuation, sheltering from severe weather, and procedures for dealing with exterior hazards and acts of violence.

Include a specific protocol for crisis communication

An effective crisis communication plan should account for messages to your impacted audiences, including customers, survivors and their families, employees and their families, news media, community members, company management, directors and investors, government officials, regulators and other authorities, and suppliers. Consider the best methods for reaching these audiences, regardless of their location. Without a comprehensive plan to communicate with all affected stakeholders, an organization risks misinformation, brand damage, and confusion when impacted parties cannot find the information they need.

Plan for a wide variety of potential crises

Brainstorm a list of potential crises and understand the region and the types of disasters most likely to have an impact on your organization. If you don't create message templates ahead of time, you risk incomplete or inconsistent messaging during a crisis – and misinforming the people you need to protect.

Plan for all stages of potential crises

Emergency notifications expert Dr. Robert Chandler identified six stages of a crisis: 1) Warning; 2) Risk Assessment; 3) Response; 4) Management; 5) Resolution; and 6) Recovery. Each of these steps is pivotal for organizations that want to control both minor and life-threatening events.

Chandler's Six Stages of a Crisis™

A plan for clear communication is vital, including consideration for each stage of a potential crisis; what, how, and to whom an organization communicates varies with each.



Use both message maps and on-the-fly messaging

Craft message maps for event stages in advance. Effective message maps deliver clear, consistent notifications, simplify complex concepts, and are appropriate before, during, and after an incident. Planning ahead also allows an organization's leaders to consider how the message will affect and motivate all audiences.

In addition to establishing pre-planned messages, organizations should be able to easily create or update messages on-the-fly. When a new message must be created in the midst of a crisis, you need the tools to support both quick creation and quick delivery.

Use Chandler's 3-3-30 rule

Both pre-planned messages and messages created on-the-fly need to be short, readable, and actionable. Although it may seem simple to broadcast a notification, a successful broadcast can prove to be much more complicated. Especially in the event of an emergency or critical incident, attention span, reading level and contact path of the recipient are all things that must be taken into consideration for a successful broadcast.

A general guideline to use when crafting messages is Dr. Chandler's 3-3-30 recommendation, outlined in *Emergency Notification*:

- No more than **three message points**
- Deliver **three short sentences**
- Keep the key content in the **first 30 words**

These guidelines may be hard to hit exactly, but realize the first 30 seconds is the best chance to get your audience's attention.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) highlights the importance of matching the speed and frequency of your messages to how quickly and how long you audience needs to know your information.

Law enforcement and local organizations kept these rules in mind when responding to the attack in Boston. Not only do these rules improve the effectiveness of the communication, but the simple act of having guidelines reduces the risk of human error, contributing to the successful management critical incidents.

The messages sent out by the City of Waltham and City of Watertown during the manhunt for the Boston bombing suspects are an example of short, readable, and actionable:

Stay inside – Waltham Closed

(City of Waltham, MA - 04/19/2013 06:38:00 AM)

"From the Mayor and Chief of Police. It is requested that Waltham residents remain in their homes and Waltham Businesses to remain closed until the bombing suspect at large has been captured. Follow news for information. Please Do Not call the police department. Thank You for your cooperation."

Shelter in Place – Watertown MA

(City of Watertown, MA-04/19/2013 02:35:06 AM)

"This is Detective Connors with the Watertown Police Department - there's an active incident in Watertown. Chief Deveau is advising all east end Watertown residents to remain in their homes. if you hear or see anything suspicious call the Watertown Police Department at 617-972 6500."

If some recipients will receive the message via SMS, try to keep the entire message length within a single SMS message. If the message is going to be sent as an audio recording, the primary point should be covered in the first nine seconds.

Target the individual, not the device

When sending out critical messages, it is important to keep in mind that no single communication path works 100 percent of the time. During spontaneous, high impact events, service overload can cause interruptions of internet, cell, and other communication services.

To increase likelihood of reaching people as quickly as possible, organizations should have multiple paths through which they can attempt messaging. The more communication vehicles are available – cell phone, home phone, email, text messaging, fax, pager, or PDA – the more likely it is that respondents will receive critical messages when infrastructure is compromised.

Allowing recipients to specify path preferences – SMS instead of a voice call, for example – also helps organizations ensure that they reach contacts through the mode each contact monitors most frequently.

An important component of capturing multiple paths, however, is to still see each contact as an individual. This means that once the individual has received a message through a path, the message is confirmed as received, and additional attempts are not made. Limiting the amount of attempts made to each individual can help minimize infrastructure overload, and prevent organization from contributing to bandwidth issues in their attempts to get messages out. This is especially important in cases where bandwidth is compromised – for example, immediately following the Boston Marathon bombing, cell phone towers were overloaded with outgoing call attempts from concerned citizens. Not only did organizations that had the ability to send messages via email or SMS have a better chance of reaching their contacts, they also avoided contributing to the issue by avoiding taxing the overloaded cell towers.

Leverage two-way communication

The ability for organizations to engage in two-way conversations, rather than just sending notifications, can help them better gauge the severity of an incident, which contacts may need assistance, and how to best prioritize resources. Organizations can request additional information through polling, ask for feedback in the form of text and images, and allow users to submit their own on-the-scene reports. Organizations can also leverage recipient geographical information to plot a map of feedback and associated locations, helping to prioritize resources in crisis response.

In this manner, two-way communication can help organizations quickly create a more complete understanding of a crisis, before first responders even arrive on scene. In crisis events, this ability to very quickly prioritize and guide response can have a dramatic impact on event outcomes. In active attacks, timelines tend to be quick – often under two minutes. These quick timeframes for an active event mean that post-event response can have the greatest impact on casualty rates. Particularly, a complete understanding of victim locations, severity, and needs, created by swift, clear communication can be the difference between life and death.

Understand the cascading effect of incidents

One of the keys to crisis response is an understanding of the cascading effect of incidents. Incidents often have a far reaching impact for organizations and contacts outside of the epicenter.

These effects can take many different forms – for example, during the multi-city shelter-in-place order following the Boston Marathon bombing, public transportation reaching as far as Connecticut was shut down. Corporations headquartered across the globe had locations in Boston, or employees visiting the city, that they needed to reach. And airports as far away as the west coast, fearing a large-scale terrorist event, suddenly went on high alert.

Following the attack, both the Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center and the Boston Common Garage were shut down, evacuated, and swept by law enforcement dogs. “It was scary because there was a great deal of uncertainty about what might happen next,” said James Rooney, executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority. “On the list of targets, convention centers, arenas, and stadiums are always prominent.”²

Certainly, geography is a major factor in whether or not an organization will feel the direct effects of a crisis, and whether cross-organizational coordination would be beneficial. But other factors, from industry to similarities in organization scope and size, can create a virtual network of organizations that would benefit from collaboration and communication.

² ² Ailworth, Erin. " Everbridge filled communications gap in blast." Boston Globe, April 18, 2013: <http://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2013/04/17/firm-system-got-out-word-marathon-bombing-when-cellphone-networks-crashed/KXfCDuWgtCDfCouITAHjHJ/story.html>. Retrieved 8 Apr 2014.

Conclusion

Crisis communication played a pivotal role in the events that followed the explosions in downtown Boston, from the initial response to the eventual regional lock down and apprehension.

Law enforcement used mass communication platforms to enact one of the most effective and immediate regional lock downs in history, minimizing the additional loss of life and property while keeping the streets empty and citizens safe. Meanwhile, area businesses used their mass notification platforms to alert employees of office closures and instruct them to stay at their homes instead of risking a potentially dangerous commute during the manhunt. By recognizing and utilizing communication best practices, these organizations reduced the risk of human error and ensured that the information was disseminated to the population as efficiently as possible. These multiple networks expeditiously and effectively kept the population informed and safe during the duration of the event, limiting the exposure to additional loss of life or injury.

About Everbridge

Everbridge provides a unified critical communication suite that helps clients be **better prepared**, make **better decisions**, and **respond quickly** and **confidently** during disruptive events. When an incident happens, whether it's a natural disaster or an IT service outage, we automate communications to ensure that the right messages get to the right people at the right time.

THE ONLY END-TO-END PLATFORM:

- **Planning:** Everbridge is easy to set up, maintain, and organize, meaning that you're always ready for a quick, coordinated response. Everbridge ensures that the right messages get to the right people - with the most advanced opt-in portal on the market, streamlined integration with internal and external data sources, and simple group and contact management.
- **Assessment:** When trouble strikes, you need rich insight, presented simply - so you can quickly assess potential impact and make an informed decision to avoid loss. Everbridge offers the only solution on the market that meets these demanding requirements, with the most advanced interactive dashboard in the industry.
- **Response:** In critical situations, ease-of-use can mean the difference between an effective response and a mistake that carries serious consequences. Everbridge is engineered to be simple to use under pressure, with a user interface that accelerates time-to-message and reduces the likelihood of errors.
- **Delivery:** Even during large-scale disruptions, Everbridge stays on. The most advanced platform in the industry ensures that you reach your contacts - every time. And with worldwide coverage and capabilities, including globally local calling infrastructure and data storage, we're ready to support you wherever your people are in the world.

Visit www.everbridge.com to learn more.