

Vendor Evaluation

While differences between providers may be a bit confusing on the surface, look deeper and you'll find notification vendors are not all created equal.

There are a myriad of options available to notification system subscribers/buyers. How do you know which one is right for you?

Consider asking vendors these questions to determine the proper fit for your organization. Whether you're among the many who have already implemented emergency notification technology and are considering changing vendors, or you are just now looking for a solution, there's a lot to consider.

When evaluating vendors, consider the following:

- Versatility
- Functionality
- Adding Contacts
- Ease of Use
- Modalities (Channels)
- Reporting





Versatility

Consider a system that is versatile (in functionality and pricing) and can be used for multiple purposes. This makes sense for a couple of reasons. One, the more you use the service, the more familiar your organization will be with how to use it. Two, it can be used to streamline several other types of communication including customer notifications and reminders, routine staff alerts and recruitment. Consider a service that provides an unlimited calling plan versus one that charges for every call made.

Ease of Use

Make sure the interface is easy to use. When you're in the midst of chaos, the last thing you want to stress about is the technology. Register for a free trial if it's offered. Send test messages to your friends and colleagues. Thoroughly evaluate the interface to see how intuitive it is. Many emergency notification products include advanced features such as the ability for a call recipient to transfer automatically to a live operator. Make sure you understand those features and which ones are right for you.





Functionality

Make sure the notification system you choose will effectively function in a crisis. Consider all the situations that might occur. Is there a way to send messages if the network is down? The power? Phone lines? Can you discretely use the service to send a notification instead of a voice call in the case of an active shooter situation? Sit down with your people and think through the potential scenarios.

Modalities (channels)

Think about how you are most likely to send messages. Voice call? Text message? Email? If you will be sending calls, will you want to record those calls in your own voice? Or would you prefer to type the message and have it read for you in an automated voice (text to speech). Those are all important considerations for an emergency notification service; ensure you understand all the possibilities before you choose a provider.





Adding **Contacts**

Another important consideration is how you will add your contacts to the service's database. If you are a business, can you link your company directory to the service so that contact information is updated in the emergency notification service when it is updated in the employee directory? Does the service provide a way for your contacts to update their own information when they choose? Many services provide a tool that can be placed on a website where parents, employees or customers can update their own preferences. This avoids the arduous task of manually keeping everyone's information up-to-date.

Reporting

One of the many benefits of using an emergency notification service is that some products provide detailed records on the result of each call. Did someone answer? Was the message sent to voicemail? Is it a bad phone number? What time was the call received? This is a great feature if documentation is important to you and it would be beneficial to show that a call was, indeed, received if there is a dispute. Don't just ask emergency notification vendors about reporting; ask to see sample reports and compare the level of detail and readability.

