

# MASS NOTIFICATIONS SYSTEM

# BUYER'S GUIDE

*The 5 Most Important Features To Keep Your Organization Safe*

**A co-worker in your area has reported testing positive for the flu. Are you experiencing any new or worsening symptoms?**

1 – Yes, I have symptoms

2 – No, I do not have any symptoms

3 – I am unsure if I have symptoms





## INTRODUCTION

An emergency can strike your organization at any time. In fact, crisis management and business continuity threats are happening to businesses at an increased frequency. Cybercrime is up 600% due to the pandemic and even small businesses saw a 424% increase in cyberattacks within this past year.

- Climate related disasters have increased 83% over the past 20 years
- Civil unrest increased 10% globally during 2020.
- Companies now have a more disparate workforce than ever before.
- All this while the speed that we require information and need to react is at an all time high

Emergencies come without any warning, and if you're not well-prepared it can leave a trail of damages in lives, money, and time. Every organization is susceptible to these emergencies, and as they increase everyone will be impacted by these events. **When they happen, time, money and lives are at stake.**

To mitigate the impact, companies need to have an actionable crisis communication plan and tools in place BEFORE the threat arrives. One of the most essential components of any [emergency action plan](#) is an emergency notification system for your business. This is critical for your internal communications during emergencies.

**This guide is designed to help you understand what exactly an emergency notification system is, and why it is essential to combat any emergency effectively.**

# WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM?

In a critical situation, time is of the essence - especially to keep people out of harm's way. The longer it takes to respond to an emergency, the more damage it can cause. An emergency notification system for business is designed with the complexity of emergencies in mind.



**Emergency notification system:** A software solution to send emergency alerts to all stakeholders (employees, customers, vendors, community, etc.) across a variety of devices and communication channels to any size audience.

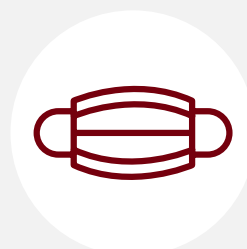
## USES FOR AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM:



Severe weather conditions



Building emergencies, hazardous incidents, power outages or closures



Local illness outbreaks or public safety threats



Cyber attack or network issues



Construction or maintenance projects



Fleet or supply chain management disruptions

No matter the size of your organization, having an emergency notification system is the first step in making it a safer place. It should utilize multiple communication channels people regularly use: email, text, voice calls, mobile app notifications, desktop alerts, and collaborative platforms such as Microsoft Teams. Sending out alerts on numerous channels improves the chances of your stakeholders receiving and acting on the alerts.

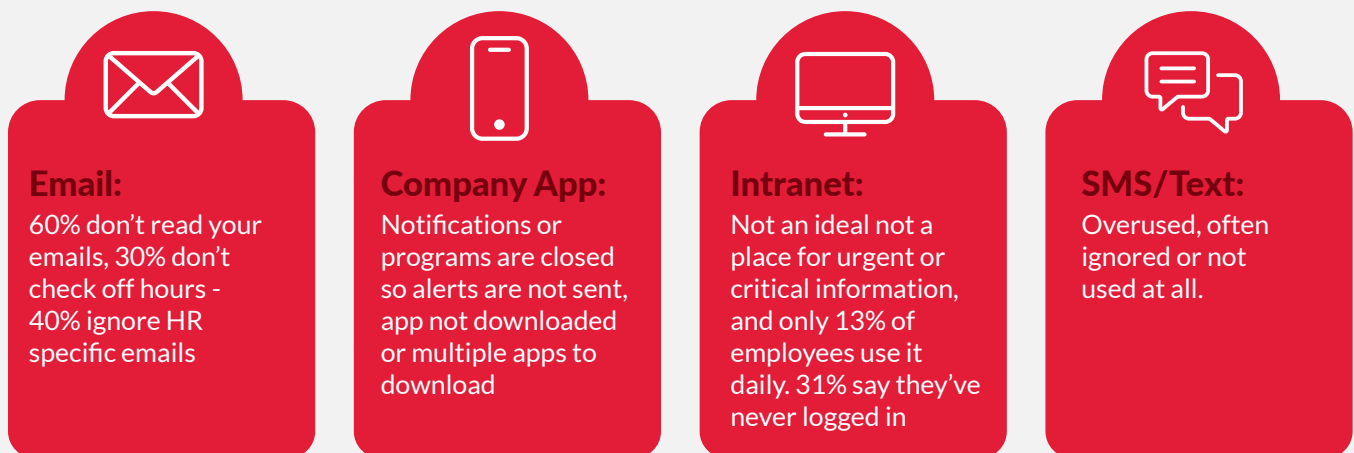
# MODERN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEMS

While initially governments were the only organizations to have emergency notification systems, businesses soon realized the benefits of having one in place to ensure the safety of their employees and other stakeholders. That's why nearly [60% of organizations](#) use some form of emergency notification system to communicate with their employees.

**But having a system isn't enough - the time-sensitive messages must be read and acted on.**

Even though we have more communication tools now than ever before, it's even harder to make sure messages are disruptive enough to be read immediately. And for less time-sensitive, yet high-priority communications (like employee or internal messages), alerts can get lost or ignored because they are competing with personal and marketing emails, calls, and texts. [74% of employees feel they are missing out on important HR communication.](#)

## COMMUNICATION [STATISTICS](#)



Particularly in the wake of COVID, more employees have worked remotely and businesses have a much more dispersed workforce. This makes the ability to immediately contact employees, customers, contractors, vendors, or others across many regions and devices essential.

Additionally, as technology has expanded past email, alerts must be sent via multi-channel methods, such as text messages or app notifications, which are used more regularly than emails. Modern emergency notification systems are built to send alerts across all major channels.



# IMPORTANT FEATURES OF AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Any large purchase should be carefully considered, however a mass notification platform even more so. As the past few years have demonstrated, companies that are not thinking ahead and adopting critical technology will fall behind. Not reacting swiftly during an emergency will not only have immediate consequences, but long term ones as well. Stakeholders have higher expectations, and any poor crisis management can be devastating for an organization. Considering these key features will help ensure you select the right platform for your business.

## 1 OVERALL



### SPEED

Speed is perhaps the most critical parameter to consider when selecting an emergency notification system. Time is of the essence when it comes to emergency situations, and if your emergency notification system can't alert your stakeholders instantly, you may not be able to keep them safe.

A good system can send alerts to all recipients in seconds across multiple channels.

The system should send out a large amount of alerts instantaneously, with no bottleneck from large number of notifications being sent out. It must also be capable of sending out the alerts on multiple channels in a short time. This ensures that your audience can receive your alerts within seconds and take the appropriate action.



## EASY TO USE

It's not just the speed of the technology that matters, the design of the emergency notification system must be well-designed to send out messages as fast as possible.

### ASPECTS OF USER-FRIENDLY SYSTEMS:

- Minimal number of steps to send a message on multiple platforms, so there's no delay in alerting your stakeholders.
- Flexible ways to segment and create groups for hyper-targeted messaging.
- Simple interface designed for non-technical users that requires minimal training to master.
- Easy to implement, including importing recipient data.

It is recommended to see at least one demo of the tool so that you can see the platform live and ask questions. Reading reviews and looking at awards regarding ease of use are another great way to ensure your rollout of the product will go smoothly.



## TRUSTWORTHY, RELIABLE AND SECURE

Again, a purchase regarding crisis communication should be very carefully considered, and you will want to partner with a reputable provider. Researching companies that have won awards, reading reviews, and asking for references are the best way to determine if a vendor is the right one for you.

### SPEED & RELIABILITY

Both the time to send alerts and the amount of time a system is "down" in a given year are critical pieces of information. Ideally messages should be sent in seconds and there should be almost no outages.

### SECURE

Your emergency notification system must be able to store the contact details of all your recipients and save all messages sent to them. This data is meant only for an internal audience, so security is paramount. Examine what security features are available to ensure only authorized personnel gain access to this data so it stays safe.

The system should provide enterprise-level security protocols such as [two factor authentication](#). All the information should be stored and transmitted in an encrypted form so that it remains secure. The vendor should also maintain industry level security to protect your data.



## HAVE THE MOST MESSAGE COVERAGE OPTIONS

As where and how we work has changed, reaching people can be challenging. Especially in an emergency, your alerts must be disruptive enough to get people's attention. A robust multi-channel notification system ensures recipients are reached on platforms they use most.

### MULTI-CHANNEL DELIVERY

With many employees more mobile, they often miss notifications. Generally people aren't motivated to change the preferences or habits around communication, which results in a lot of missed messages. In some cases this might just be frustrating, but in the event of an emergency it can be life-changing.

That's why your system must be capable of sending emergency alerts to as many channels as possible, instantly. If it doesn't, you might miss out on a big part of your stakeholders if you don't have a system that can send alerts through multiple channels.

**A system that can send alerts through all these channels at once can be instrumental in getting the message across to a majority of your stakeholders.**

- Email,
- Voice call
- SMS/Text
- App notification (mobile, Teams, etc.)
- Desktop Alerts

For employees without constant mobile access, an emergency alert system with desktop alerts is crucial. Desktop alerts ensure critical information is immediately seen and acted upon where employees work, including desktops, laptops, and shared spaces like reception desks. This capability should include:

- Easy ability to send messages to multiple channels, including desktop alerts
- Multiple desktop alert options based on message type and priority, such as corner screen, half-screen, or full-screen takeovers requiring a response
- Capability to check device online/offline status before sending and set time durations for offline messages
- Ability to target shared computer spaces like hospital nursing stations without tying alerts to individual recipients
- Full message functionality, including acknowledgment, polling, and the ability to send links and attachments

# 2 ESSENTIAL AUDIENCE TARGETING FEATURES

If your company has a vast workforce that's distributed across different locations, or if your employees travel regularly, your software solution must have robust audience targeting capabilities.

This can help target a specific group from your company to send the alert to. You can ensure that only stakeholders who need to be alerted are informed about the emergency, and that unnecessary messages aren't sent, which can cause panic or alert fatigue.

## Possible ways to segment contacts:

- Role/Title/Department
- Address/location on file
- Activity (logins, training dates, etc.)
- GPS location via a smartphone
- Desktop device, location and online status

For maximum effectiveness of your system, you should use it only when it's necessary and target those who'll be affected by the emergency.



## GEOTARGETING

Imagine a fire or tornado warning has been issued, and you need to immediately alert employees in the affected areas. Using geolocation and geofencing ensures messages go only to relevant groups, avoiding unnecessary panic and providing relevant instructions quickly to those that need them.

By sending real-time [location-based alerts](#), you'll be able to send messages to only those stakeholders who are likely to be affected by the crisis. This ensures that all those who aren't going to be affected aren't disturbed with the alert. As a result, you'll be able to avoid creating excess panic and manage the situation better without any distractions.





## GROUPING OPTIONS

No matter what kind of communication, sending it to the right people is important. For mass notifications, segmenting is critical to reaching employees and other stakeholders at just the right time with precise and applicable messages.

**A strong system will have an easy-to-use yet robust grouping tool, so you can send hyper targeted alerts.**

- Dynamic query options, including AND/OR
- Ability to include custom fields or parameters
- Continuous data synchronization, so fields such as role, department, address, etc. are always up to date to create groups on the fly.
- Draw geofencing lines on a map to only send alerts to certain areas based on real-time location

# 3 ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION FEATURES



## MESSAGE CUSTOMIZATION + TEMPLATES

The ability to preload message templates removes the stress of creating the messages during an emergency. Emergencies can be stressful situations where you may not be able to draft clear messages quickly. In such a situation, pre-built messages save time and stress.

An experienced solutions provider will have the ability for you to create pre-built templates, and have template ideas you can use that incorporate best practices, ensuring you send the most effective messages to your recipients.

Either way, here are some templates you'll want to draft before an emergency occurs:

- Severe weather
- Building emergencies or closures
- Public health and safety
- Cyber attack or network issues
- Construction or maintenance projects
- Supply chain management disruptions

## TWO-WAY MESSAGING

While not applicable in all emergencies, two-way messaging can be critical in some instances. Allowing employees to respond to alerts ensures safety:

- Report problems
- Ask questions
- Confirm receipt of message
- Give exact location  
(e.g. where in a building)
- Provide information for first responders
- Ask for help

Close the loop quicker when your recipients can send texts or emails to you, and receive real-time feedback with Polling and Acknowledgement to make smart crisis management decisions.

## MULTI-LANGUAGE

The last thing you want during an emergency is to let language barriers get in the way of conveying critical information to your employees. It is imperative your [mass notification system supports multiple languages](#).

## RECIPIENT MOBILE APP

Unlike computers, smartphones are usually within arm's reach. A strong emergency notification system should also have an app for smartphones to quickly send alerts that are much more likely to be seen.

Additionally, the [emergency notification apps](#) must be available on both [Android](#) and [iOS operating systems](#) so they can be downloaded on most phones in the market. Thankfully, most modern emergency notification systems are specifically designed for mobile devices, making it easy for you to send out alerts whenever there's a need.

# 4 ESSENTIAL DATA MANAGEMENT FEATURES



## SECURE, EASY TO MANAGE DATABASE

### INTEGRATIONS

In an emergency, up-to-date contact information in one database, to immediately send communication is critical. This is often most efficiently accomplished with integrations.

Integrations can help expand the capabilities of your emergency notification software solution by using platforms and data you already have. Seamlessly keeping data current means your alerts go to recipients without error.

- Conference bridges
- Azure AD
- File Sync
- Web portal or mobile app for recipients

## REGISTRATION PORTAL/APP

While multiple communication channels are helpful, it is even more helpful when the audience can help manage where they want to get alerts, their contact information, and their message history. This is best achieved through a web portal or app.

- **GATHER AND UPDATE RECIPIENT DATA SEAMLESSLY:** Easily capture additional recipient data and consent, if needed.
- **MORE INFORMED RECIPIENTS:** Your recipients always have a comprehensive history of your communications with a log of all alerts, messages, surveys and polls sent, no matter what channel the communication came from.
- **GREATER CONTROL, EASE OF SETUP AND AND SECURITY:** The app should be fully controlled, whitelabeled and and customized by you, and easy to install it privately (for company controlled devices).

# 5 REPORTING AND ANALYTICS

When you're looking for an emergency notification system, be sure to look for detailed analytics and reporting features. Your system should prove it is reaching your intended audience within the desired timeframe. This reporting and analytics capability can help you improve the safety of your employees.

Some of the basic metrics that your emergency notification system must be able to report include:

- Message delivery status and statistics
- Delivery performance of each channel
- Real-time replies from your recipients

Such analytics need to be available in real-time so that you can remain on top of everything during an emergency, as well as demonstrate after the fact that you followed your emergency plan.



# DEPLOYMENT

When choosing an emergency notification system for your organization, you need to decide the mode of deployment as well. There are two modes of deployment that most vendors offer: on-premise and cloud.

**On-premise solutions** are ones where the software solution is installed in a physical location that's managed by you. If you go for on-premise solutions, and your IT infrastructure fails during emergencies, then the emergency notification system won't be able to send out emergency alerts. This is usually the riskiest option, with many pitfalls.

In a **cloud-hosted solution**, the software is installed in an off-site location that is

distributed across multiple data centers. As a result, server maintenance is carried out by dedicated professionals who are managing the data centers, ensuring the emergency notification system will constantly remain online. Even if one server or a complete data center goes down, other servers and data centers can pick up their load. This ensures 99.99% uptime of the service.

Additionally, cloud-hosted solutions turn out to be cost-effective, as the cloud host handles the maintenance operations. To access cloud-hosted emergency notification systems, all you need is internet access.





# CUSTOMER SUPPORT

As with any product, you want to know when you need help you'll be able to get it. Researching these topics will help you determine if the vendor offers quality support options:

- Who will offer the support?
- How will support be delivered?
- Through which modes will you be able to reach out to customer support?
- When is support available?
- Will dedicated resources be available?

Ideally, the customer service staff should be available round-the-clock on multiple channels to address your concerns quickly. Again, reading reviews is a good way to learn more about how a company supports their customers.

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## NON-EMERGENCY USE

While emergency notification systems are primarily used in crisis situations, they can be used for many other purposes.



**Regular maintenance  
and IT notifications**



**Surveys  
or polls**



**Coordination  
efforts**



**Announcements**

While this is an extended use of a mass notification system, it is important to avoid alert fatigue. Otherwise, when there is an emergency recipients may ignore the alerts.

# WHO NEEDS AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM?

Emergencies can strike any size or type of organization at any moment, and being prepared is the best insurance. Not only can this protect people and property, but it can also ensure business continuity.

## **Almost all industries can use an emergency notification system:**

- [Commercial Real Estate](#)
- [Financial Services](#)
- [Government](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Manufacturing](#)
- [Nonprofits](#)
- [Senior living facilities](#)
- Any other organization where a unified communication platform is needed.

While having a system is an important component, for it to work you must have a solid emergency communication plan in place. This plan must include all stakeholders to ensure you can reach everyone in time. A great emergency notification system will help any organization utilize its communication capabilities to the fullest and help them reach their audience in the shortest time possible.

# DO I NEED AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM?

Just like all software solutions, you need to carefully decide if you need an emergency notification system. While it always helps to have it, you should assess your organization and the system thoroughly to figure out if you need it.

You should consider a whole range of factors, from the [emergency notification system pricing](#) to the features and reviews on major software directories like [Capterra](#) and [G2](#). Choose to go ahead with the purchase only once you've weighed all the factors. Here are some [comprehensive assessments](#) that you can carry out to figure out if you need an emergency notification software solution.

## ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

The first step is to analyze your organization to find out its requirements. Every organization is unique and will have unique needs. You should ask specific questions to figure out the type of solution that you might need:

- How many stakeholders/employees does my organization have?
- How many branches do we have?
- Does my organization have any remote employees/stakeholders?
- What is the current state of internal communication in my organization?
- Is the current system able to reach all my recipients?
- Do my employees need to travel regularly?
- Which internal systems require integration?
- Can a cloud-based emergency notification system help my organization?
- What processes can the solution simplify?

## ASSESS YOUR CURRENT CAPABILITIES

To figure out if you need an emergency notification system, you need to first assess the current state of affairs in your organization. For this, you need to answer the following questions:

- Are we currently using an emergency notification system?
- If so, does it meet our expectations
- Does the system have mobile apps for users?
- How many channels does your current system send alerts to?
- How long does it take to send a message?
- Does the current system provide any analytical data?
- Can the system send alerts to various segments of your stakeholders/employees?
- Does the system permit one-way or two-way communication?
- How many languages does the system permit?
- Can the system be used for non-emergency purposes?
- Will the organization's current internal communication system remain online at all times?

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

The location of your organization and stakeholders/employees determines the emergencies that they might face. Additionally, the nature of your work can pose a major threat to your organization and stakeholders. It's important to know the possible crisis that can strike your organization when you're looking for an emergency notification system. Here are some questions that you need to ask yourself:

- Where is my organization located?
- Where are my employees/stakeholders located?
- Which environmental hazards are common in the location(s) of my organization?
- Which industrial or internal hazards does my organization face?
- Is my organization's IT infrastructure strong enough to fend off cyberattacks?
- Does my organization have an emergency communication plan in place?
- Is the organization's current internal communication system enough to communicate effectively?

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## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ASSESSMENT

An emergency notification system is a communication system. Before zeroing in on the perfect one for your organization, you need to figure out the internal communication culture in your organization. To find out which is the right system for you, answer the following questions:

- How do my stakeholders/employees currently communicate?
- Which channels do my stakeholders/employees prefer to use for communication?
- How well have your stakeholders/employees communicated during previous emergencies, if any?
- How much training would be necessary to train your employees to use the new emergency notification system?





# HOW CAN REDFLAG HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION?

[RedFlag](#) is a cloud-based emergency notification system for use by a small business or enterprise company that can help you send alerts in seconds. It comes with pre-built templates you can customize to send emergency communications.

## MULTI-CHANNEL

Use RedFlag to send alerts through text, emails, voice calls, Microsoft Teams, app notifications, desktop alerts, and more. This ensures that your recipients will be able to receive them. You can even find out if they've read it through an [acknowledgment option](#) for which your recipients just need to tap a link.

## SEGMENT/GROUP

Use robust tools to send notifications to a group or a specific individual. You can also further segment your audience based on their real-time location with [powerful geotargeting features](#).

## DATA SYNC

Easily [manage and sync your recipient data](#) with the flexibility you need for your organization. Sync automatically with Azure Directory, file sync multiple file types, custom sync with your HR platform via API, or even have recipients add their data via web & mobile app.

## MULTI-LANGUAGE SUPPORT

With RedFlag you can send and receive alerts in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. The smart interface of the [platform](#) automatically adapts to the language in which you're composing your message. It also recognizes dialects to ensure that the voice message sent across is clear and doesn't cause any confusion.

## MOBILE APPS

RedFlag offers [Android and iOS apps](#) for users to easily and quickly send messages on the fly. RedFlag also has an easy registration process for recipients, allowing for self-registration, or you can upload via Excel or CVS, or an integration with a third party system. The intuitive interface ensures that no or minimal training is required to implement the solution in your organization.

## TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

RedFlag facilitates [two-way communication](#) to improve the coordination in your organization. It also provides detailed feedback in real-time from message recipients.

## REPORTING/ANALYTICS

RedFlag gives you complete control over all the notification related activities by providing online reports to help you track it all.

## SECURE

Hosted on Azure Cloud, RedFlag is backed by world-class security. And if that's not enough, you can create an additional security layer through [two factor authentication](#).

## AWARD WINNING

Pocketstop RedFlag, a mass notification solution, has been awarded Easiest to Use, Users Most Likely to Recommend, and winner of 15 total badges in the Emergency Mass Notification Software category for the Fall 2022 on G2. RedFlag was also named a High Performer, demonstrating leadership in simplifying emergency communications for organizations in North America.



Gartner Capterra's  
Top Rated Mass  
Notification  
System

# TESTIMONIALS

*"We love the RedFlag solution! We moved from another provider and the RedFlag team made the transition and execution painless. We appreciate both how easy it is to use and our ongoing partnership."*

– **Brooke B.**  
AdvoCare

*"RedFlag has very quickly become the center of our critical communication plans."*

– **Brandon Howard,**  
Retail Communication  
Support Manager  
Giant Eagle Supermarkets

*"By utilizing RedFlag, we are better able to facilitate quick and timely communication during an emergency."*

– **Karen Raquet,**  
Director of National  
Property Services | JLL

*"When we need to send critical messages in a crunch, they're right there – it's not me in a panic trying to figure out what to write."*

– **Secille Siverio,**  
Property Management  
Regency Square

*"RedFlag has been such a great benefit to our company and our residents. I would highly recommend the system."*

– **Cindy Sheridan,**  
National Service Director  
Lincoln Military Housing

*"With Hurricane Harvey coming our way, we used RedFlag to send updates, keeping our tenants at the San Antonio Rivercenter location up-to-date and prepared."*

– **Debbie Sandberg,**  
Marketing Manager | JLL

*"We are so excited to have RedFlag as part of our safety plan. It will serve an absolutely critical function in the event of an emergency. Seconds matter during crisis; the ability to notify our community instantaneously could make the difference in finding a lost child, or getting people to shelter during a severe storm."*

– **Crystal Charvarie,**  
VP of Risk Management  
YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas



# WANT TO LEARN MORE?

If you think RedFlag is a valuable addition towards improving the safety of your stakeholders/employees, [request your demo](#) of our emergency notification system today.