Macquarie University prioritizes safety of staff and students with BlackBerry AtHoc

At a Glance

Sydney's Macquarie University is uniquely located in the heart of Australia's largest high-tech precinct. Bringing together 40,000 students and 3000 staff, it is a thriving hub of discovery. The campus spans 126 hectares, with facilities including a gym and pools, private teaching hospital and a high-tech library. The University also enjoys excellent transport links to the city and suburbs, supported by an on-campus train station.

With thousands of people on campus at any one time, security is one of the top priorities for this leading institution. In addition to the neighbouring business park and train station, the University also borders a major shopping precinct and motorway, heightening challenges not only for the campus, but also for areas bordering and impacting upon the University.

MACQUARIE University

Industry Education
Location Sydney, Australia
Students/Staff 40,000/3,000
Products BlackBerry AtHoc
www.mq.edu.au

The Challenge

With safety a key consideration for students attending the University, and to meet regulatory compliance requirements for staff workplace health and safety, the Emergency Management Team needed a critical incident mass notification solution that could deliver targeted, or 'en masse', alerts to potentially thousands of students and personnel – in real-time – using multiple channels. The University didn't want to ask people to carry an extra device, so a key requirement was to find an easy-to-deploy solution that would integrate with what staff and students already had in their hands – mobiles and laptops.

John Durbridge, Campus Security Manager, Property, Macquarie University says: "Macquarie University takes the safety of students and staff very seriously, particularly considering that security is one of the top three reasons students come to Australian universities. When I joined in 2011, the University was researching a solution to co-ordinate and update our crisis communication response strategy."

The Solution

After careful evaluation, Macquarie University chose to implement BlackBerry AtHoc to enable immediate and effective communication to members of the University community. In the event of a crisis, both remotely and on-site. For example, warning people not to enter the campus in the event of an incident; or alerting people in a specific building or area in the event of a fire alarm.

John Durbridge says: "We wanted to be crisis-ready and have a robust mass notification system in place. Although we approached several overseas and local companies, we were most impressed with BlackBerry AtHoc's security credentials with the US Defence Force and the solution's ability to tick all the boxes in our 'wish list'. BlackBerry AtHoc's solution was the obvious choice."

Winner of ASIAL's Australian Security Industry Awards for Excellence technical security solution award in 2013

The suite of integrated applications, Alert, Collect, Account and Connect deployed by Macquarie runs on BlackBerry AtHoc's secure "Internet of things" cloud platform. It uses mobility, hybrid cloud and the IP network to deliver a unified, secure end-to-end solution that allows real-time communication with the University community, alerting them via email as well as the option of text message on devices.

The system syncs directly with the University's active directory each day, ensuring that the database is live and accurate, and can share a single format message over multiple platforms in the event of a crisis on campus, or in the surrounding area.

As a world-class institution, we require world-class technology to ensure Macquarie University is 'crisis-ready'. Knowing that the BlackBerry AtHoc solution we have in place is used by US and Australian Defence Forces gives us peace of mind, but better still, we found the ease of deployment, ongoing management, scalability and multi-platform reach enables the University to keep our staff and students safe – 24/7. The security team especially likes the real-time feedback of the system which allows us to maintain real-time responses to alerts sent and to have greater control over our solution. The BlackBerry AtHoc customer service team is always on hand to support us.

John Durbridge
Campus Security Manager, Property, Macquarie University

Secure Multichannel Communication

The solution's underlying commitment to data security and privacy was of paramount importance, requiring the protection of personal details that are necessary for emergency response systems. It was not an option for these channels to be breached and the information leaked, so it was vital that the latest state-of-the art security was built into the technology's DNA.

Another key issue was ensuring that any crisis response alerts could be seen quickly by the Macquarie University community – and also for the security response team to know when they are opened or read.

John Durbridge commented: "We were aware when researching an appropriate solution that anything that required additional technology platforms was not going to give us the response rate we required."

"We needed something that was multi-platform and integrated with the devices already used by our staff and students. This was why BlackBerry AtHoc was the perfect choice for our needs – it was delivered on a layer of channels and provided a range of options to contact individuals. The solution hooks into our active directory here at the University, so we can be sure new members are being connected to the system. We made the decision that email would be mandatory and SMS optional, and this can be scaled as we choose."

Implementation and Usability

The speed of integration and ease of deployment was another factor that impressed Macquarie University. "We were able to move from the decision to implement the system through to integration in less than six months, including testing. This was extremely important to us as we needed a solution aimed directly at the safety of our staff and students. After all, you never know when a crisis is likely to occur," John explained.

When the system was up and running; Macquarie University was able to use the technology right away without the need for extensive training. John says, "The system was incredibly easy to use and to communicate to staff and students. We were especially impressed with the self-service portal
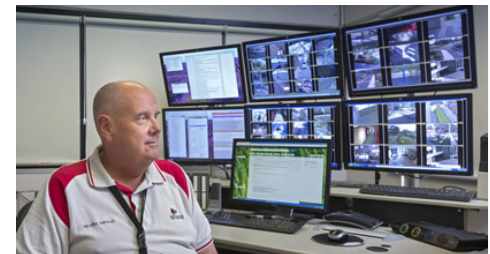
and real-time alert system, allowing us to see the status of the messages shared. There was even the functionality to drill into the location of those that had received the messages, for example if they were on or off campus. We test the system twice a day to ensure we are always ready to go, and use it for various emergency responses such as fire evacuations as it caters for all levels of risk."

Scalability

For an organisation like Macquarie University, the ability to easily increase functionality is paramount. The BlackBerry AtHoc Networked Crisis Communication Suite provides multiple options for further scalability. The University is investigating functions such as geo-targeting to enable the security response team to locate people in specific buildings at specific times, as well as the 'duress' button on the BlackBerry AtHoc would give an extra security layer for staff working on campus late at night, for example.

"We work in an environment where the importance of the safety of our students and staff is something that can't be underestimated. We are constantly looking to ways to enhance our systems and BlackBerry AtHoc provides the scalability and functionality for us to do this."

About BlackBerry

BlackBerry is securing a connected world, delivering innovative solutions across the entire mobile ecosystem and beyond. We secure the world's most sensitive data across all end points – from cars to smartphones – making the mobile-first enterprise vision a reality. Founded in 1984 and based in Waterloo, Ontario, BlackBerry operates offices in North America, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America. The Company trades under the ticker symbols "BB" on the Toronto Stock Exchange and "BBRY" on the NASDAQ. For more information, visit www.blackberry.com.