To Securely Coordinate the 2018 G7 Presidency, Global Affairs Canada's Summits Management Office (SMO) Turned To BlackBerry AtHoc

Global Affairs Canada

Industry:
Public Sector

Location:
Canada

Employees:
~400

Product:
BlackBerry® AtHoc®

Global Affairs Canada

At a Glance

The G7 Summit is one of the most complex, high-security events in the world, bringing together international leaders to collaborate on a wide range of global issues. In order to keep communication streamlined, secure, and coordinated, Global Affairs Canada's Summits Management Office (SMO) used BlackBerry® AtHoc® in their Summit Integrated Command Center (SICC).

The Organization

"We're basically the nerve center of the entire G7 Summit," explains Michel Bouvier, Chief Operations Officer of the Summit Integrated Command Center (SICC). "We monitor VIP movements, recording activities in close collaboration with our partners. We also provide effective resolution to issues and challenges, coordinate schedule changes, and manage incidents and emergencies."

Hosted annually by a member nation of the G7 – an informal grouping of some of the world's most advanced economies including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and two representatives from the European Union – the G7 Summit brings together leaders from across the globe to discuss a range of pressing international issues. Coordinating the event

is a massive undertaking, requiring a great deal of collaboration and agility. In Canada, this responsibility falls to the SICC, part of Global Affairs Canada's Summit Management Office.

To manage the months leading up to the Summit and the Summit itself, the Summits Management Office worked with multiple government agencies. The team for 2018, for example, was comprised of over 400 employees from various federal departments. Partners included Health Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Transport Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces, Shared Services Canada, Justice Canada, and many others.

The Challenge

"One of our most important tasks is to know and define who will be where and when," says Bouvier. "We need to know the movements of VIPs down to the minute, including leaders, ministers, and spouses. It's a big logistical challenge, as their movements constantly overlap with each other, and multiple events are usually happening simultaneously – it's therefore critical that we're coordinated in our approach."

The SICC assigns each VIP – leaders, ministers, and their spouses – a liaison officer. These liaison officers are responsible for providing the command center with by-the-minute updates on the VIP. When Canada hosted the G20 Summit in 2010, this was primarily achieved through push-to-talk radios and cell phone calls to the SICC.

"For the G20, each liaison officer was assigned a radio, and we monitored all channels with an emergency override protocol," explains Bouvier. "Officers also received personalized crib sheets containing the telephone numbers of people around the SICC table and an outline of their responsibilities and our expectations for communication."

Although this strategy worked well enough at the time, Bouvier and his team were cognizant of the communication delays it often introduced. These delays were only further exacerbated because the RCMP and the SICC operated as two separate entities. When it came time for Canada to host the G7 Summit again in 2018, the SICC saw an opportunity to streamline operations.

"In 2010, when we did the Summit, we had two ministerial meetings – foreign and finance," says Bouvier. "For 2018, we had nine. That was a lot more work for us, and a great deal more complex than expected. We adapted, but that meant we had to plan accordingly."

The first step was to ensure all partnered organizations, including the RCMP, were fully-integrated with the SICC. The next step was for the SICC to revisit its communications infrastructure. It was this drive that led the agency to BlackBerry AtHoc.

"When you're running an event as complex as the G7 Summit, nothing ever goes exactly as planned. Anything can happen. BlackBerry AtHoc helps ensure that no matter what issues we encounter, we're ready to address them quickly and efficiently."

- Michel Bouvier,
Chief of Operations, Summit Integrated Command Center, Global Affairs Canada's Summits Management Office

The Solution

A comprehensive crisis communication and emergency alerting solution, BlackBerry AtHoc is also a powerful tool for accountability and operational efficiency. Through two-way communication and geo-tagging, it enables immediate collaboration between operations centers and field personnel. Its automatic logging functionality, meanwhile, aids in both compliance and post-event evaluation.

BlackBerry AtHoc was already used extensively within the Canadian government. Bouvier and his team recognized its potential. Together, they made the decision to run a pilot of the platform in April during one of the initial Summit meetings, known as ministerials.

"While our ministerial meetings were taking place, a terrorist drove a van down Toronto's Younge street, killing ten people and injuring sixteen others," says Bouvier. "The ministers in attendance were all supposed to go to an off-site location an hour after the incident. Obviously, that immediately became unfeasible."

"Through coordination with the RCMP and the Toronto Police Services, we learned about the incident before it even hit the news," he continues. "We then used BlackBerry AtHoc to coordinate changes to the schedule and travel routes for a delegation of approximately ten thousand people. We were able to achieve this in minutes, something which would not have been possible were we still reliant on our old infrastructure – after that, our decision to keep using BlackBerry AtHoc was more or less unanimous."

Liaison officers were given access to a range of prepopulated templates that allowed them to quickly and easily provide updates on VIP movements. For the Leaders Summit itself, the SICC established three separate operations centers, including its core command center, and gave staff at each operations center the ability to view all notifications sent through BlackBerry AtHoc.

"We had an operations center in La Malbaie, another at the CFB Bagotville Airbase and another in Quebec City," says Bouvier. "All the logistics and communications were monitored and recorded through our command center, and BlackBerry AtHoc kept everyone within our organization in close contact with each other."

The Results

Better Visibility: In addition to geo-tagging their location when they send an update through BlackBerry AtHoc, liaison officers can also configure GPS tracking to allow the app to continually update their position in real-time. This provides Bouvier and his team with more complete visibility into VIPs' movements such as ministers and world leaders, improving overall security for events. It also allows for timelier adjustments when faced with potential delays.

Improved Coordination: Thanks to BlackBerry AtHoc, the SICC can coordinate events across the country without requiring a command center in each city. During the 2018 G7 Presidency, two ministerial conferences happened simultaneously in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Montreal, Quebec. Bouvier and his team were able to handle both events seamlessly, from one location.

"BlackBerry AtHoc has completely changed the ballgame for us. During the 2018 Summit, we still equipped liaison officers with radios, but almost no one used them. Everyone communicated via AtHoc. It's completely changed how we connect with our personnel on the ground."

- Michel Bouvier,
Chief of Operations, Summit Integrated Command Center, Global Affairs Canada's Summits Management Office

An added benefit of BlackBerry AtHoc is that personnel such as operational managers don't need to be in the command center to know exactly what's going on. All they need to do to stay up to date is open BlackBerry AtHoc on their mobile device or laptop to receive instant updates.

"We have staff everywhere," Bouvier continues. "And we're able to use BlackBerry AtHoc to communicate not only with people in the same city as us, but all over the country. I can see who's at the airport in Vancouver or Halifax from the other side of the country, and quickly get them the information they need to do their jobs."

Agility and Flexibility: The coordination and visibility offered by BlackBerry AtHoc allows the SICC to respond almost immediately to incidents and itinerary changes. When a liaison officer or other official needs to notify the command center of a potential issue, they can simply report it via pre-populated templates within the app. The SICC is also able to quickly push out targeted alerts to everyone who needs to see them.

For example, if a leader will arrive late to a scheduled event, a pre-written alert can be instantly sent to all liaison officers through the BlackBerry AtHoc app. They can then quickly coordinate a response, keeping the operations center updated through geo-tagging and two-way communication. Every command center connected to the AtHoc platform has access to this information.

Additionally, AtHoc's IP-based messages are sent over a secure channel, which helps guarantee delivery and avoids many of the pitfalls associated with traditional SMS messages.

Automatic Logging: Every time a liaison officer or official contacts the SICC, all details of their communiqué must be registered and recorded in a logbook for auditing purposes. For even a minor ministerial, this resulted in a massive volume of work. Thanks to BlackBerry AtHoc, much of this logging now occurs automatically.

"For every movement/event reported and every alert published via BlackBerry AtHoc, we know who sent it, where they sent it from, and when they sent it," explains Bouvier. "This information is automatically populated into a log, which can then be exported to a spreadsheet with a few clicks. Even though we do still get calls and need scribes to record them in our logbooks, BlackBerry AtHoc has saved us a ton of work."

"It's really helped us throughout the year, and completely changed logging for us – it's something we're going to use again and again," he adds.

About BlackBerry

BlackBerry (NYSE: BB; TSX: BB) provides intelligent security software and services to enterprises and governments around the world. The company secures more than 500M endpoints including 150M cars on the road today. Based in Waterloo, Ontario, the company leverages AI and machine learning to deliver innovative solutions in the areas of cybersecurity, safety and data privacy solutions, and is a leader in the areas of endpoint security management, encryption, and embedded systems. BlackBerry's vision is clear — to secure a connected future you can trust.

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