

A young woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white sweater and a backpack, is walking on a paved path and looking down at her smartphone. In the background, other people are walking on the same path, and there are trees and a building. The entire image has a blue overlay.

How to Overcome **5 Challenges to Notify Temporary Visitors**

INTRODUCTION

Mass notification systems are an integral part of how colleges and universities communicate with students and faculty since the Clery Act was updated in 2010. As part of the Clery Act, higher education institutions receiving federal funding initially had to disclose information about certain crimes that occur on or near campus. The Act evolved to mandate public and private colleges and universities to establish and implement emergency response and notification systems.

Mass notification systems are a critical campus safety resource, sending first warnings and real-time updates as an adverse event progresses. Even if institutions dedicate time and effort maintaining their databases, they may still be neglecting to notify a critical component of their campus — temporary visitors. If a large-scale incident occurs, parents, contractors and other visiting guests might not be included in the mass notification database and may be unaware of an imminent threat.

According to Rave Mobile Safety's survey, [Colleges and Universities Not Using Mass Notifications to Full Ability](#), 85% of higher education institutions don't send mass notifications to visitors.

Some colleges and universities have found a way to solve this issue by implementing a text to opt-in feature that integrates with their current mass notification system. This feature, also known as short message service (SMS) Opt-In, enables higher education institutions to communicate with visitors while they're on campus. Visitors are able to opt in to an institution's mass notification system temporarily by texting a unique keyword to a short code.

There are many challenges that prevent colleges and universities from including visiting guests in their mass communication plans. The following are the top five challenges colleges and universities have overcome when leveraging a mass notification platform to notify temporary visitors on their campuses.



Identify Who You Will Notify

Colleges and universities host parents, conference attendees, contractors and other temporary visitors on a single day or for a certain period of time. Keep in mind who these temporary visitors are and who you want to notify while they're on campus:

- **Prospective students and their families touring campus**
- **Seminar and conference staff and attendees**
- **Summer camp counselors and workers, as well as campers' parents**
- **Contract employees, such as groundskeepers, construction staff and dining hall personnel**
- **Event attendees, including commencement, sporting events and homecoming**
- **Students' parents who want to receive notifications throughout the school year**

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Determine which temporary visitors, such as parents, contractors and sports fans, you want to send additional communications to while they're on your campus. By identifying and including these members of your community, you can highlight your college or university's comprehensive approach to safety and preparedness.



Customize For Different Audiences

Colleges and universities host all kinds of temporary visitors — from sports fans and parents to contractors, guest lecturers and conference attendees — at various events, including football games, commencements, summer camps and conferences. With this range of visitors, you'll need to identify and categorize them so you can send your visitors relevant notifications. You can group visitors by the type of communications they would like to receive, their length of stay on campus, or the type of event they are participating in. Communications also don't have to be limited to emergencies. These communications can offer general information about event parking, activities during Family Weekend or ongoing construction projects.

Each separate category of visitors can be assigned a unique keyword. Visitors can be added to your mass notification system by entering a unique keyword for a special event or list. They will receive a customized welcome message specific to their event or use case.

In addition, you can use keywords for multiple events, such as a summer camp program that has various sessions. You can also reuse keywords for different events as long as the notification periods don't overlap. For example, a keyword can be used to inform conference attendees and then reused for parents attending graduation.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

The ability to customize and categorize temporary visitors will help you notify and provide information and timely updates to people who have requested it. Additionally, keywords can change and be reused for a new list of temporary visitors, as long as the events don't run concurrently.



Include Temporary Visitors in Current Emergency Preparedness Plans

When an emergency strikes, it can be a stressful time for your campus community. You likely know you're going to use a combination of communication modes, such as push notifications, email, social media and public address systems, to make any announcements. The best way to prepare for different situations, such as severe weather events, active shooter incidents or building closures, is to create preset notification templates. As you create these templates, you can simply check off the option to include temporary visitors in your notifications. This option will save you from having to take additional steps to create messages for temporary visitors.

The messaging to your visitors would most likely be the same as your campus community. Create blank details, such as date and location. Alerts shouldn't be sent out until circumstantial data, such as date, location or situation, is completed. These situations are generally stressful, so it'll take pressure off of your staff who will send out these messages, decrease the chance of incorrect information getting out, and help messages get delivered quickly.

When you craft a message, use straightforward language, include any current information you have, and use directions that are easy to follow and understand. For example, if your college or university has different street access points and flooding has shut down one street, be specific about which street is closed.



Here are some other tips when creating notifications for your entire campus community:

- Use short, specific subject lines for emails.
- In push notifications, keep the character limits short (about 160 characters) or your message will be broken up into multiple parts.
- When you're leaving a voicemail or using a public address system, announce the main part of the alert in the first eight seconds. All voice alerts need to be repeated at least three times to counter any other noise that could drown out the alert or cause distractions.

As you create your templates ahead of time, you can also develop keywords for your temporary visitors. Once they use a dedicated short code to opt in to your mass notification system, you'll be able to communicate with your visiting guests while they're on your campus. Your IT department won't have to spend hours manually entering or deleting these visitors from your database, and your safety and security departments won't need to find additional ways to communicate with visitors and contractors.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Create preset templates for all of your modes of communication to help alleviate stress for your administrators and campus community. As you develop these templates, you can click the option to alert your visiting guests and you won't have to take any extra steps to alert temporary visitors. In addition, setting up keywords for your visitors will help you alert a wider audience while they're on your campus.

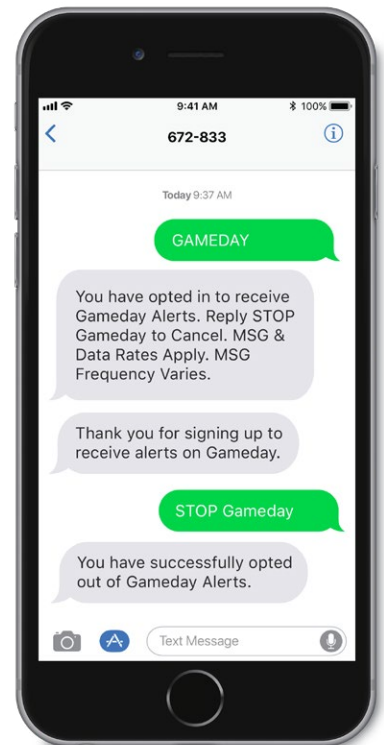


Provide an Easy Way to Opt Out of Temporary Notifications

By definition, temporary visitors are on on your campus for a limited period of time. These guests may be on-site for a day, weeks or months, but might not want to continue receiving notifications after they're no longer on campus. In addition to providing a user-friendly opt out experience, you should have the option to automatically opt out temporary visitors from messages after they're no longer needed. You can automatically set an expiration time for each keyword by setting an opt-out period for a specific date or time frame and a custom expiration message when the subscription expires. For example, a game day keyword could expire in one day, while a camp keyword could last for two weeks. Visitors can also easily opt out of your notifications by texting "STOP" at anytime, and they'll receive a message confirming they've opted out.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Giving temporary visitors the ability to opt out of your messages will ensure they're receiving relevant notifications only while they're on your campus. You can either enable them to opt out or set up an expiration time, so visitors will only receive messages when it's relevant to them.





Keep Lists For Mandatory & Temporary Messages Separate

A text to opt-in option is a very easy way for nonmembers of your database to receive notifications. You should have the ability to set up public and private lists to target both current members and nonmembers of your database. By setting up a public list, you are enabling anyone to opt in to temporarily receive messages. Recipients will only receive communications associated with that specific public list, such as sports fans receiving updates about game day activities.

By setting up a private list, you can allow students, faculty and other members of your institution to opt in to specific alerts, such as notifying faculty members about certain department meetings. These private lists will be only sent to people already in your database.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

A public list enables visitors to receive alerts when their specific list is targeted with an alert. For example, parents can be notified about parking restrictions during move-in day. Meanwhile, private lists allow members of your organization to opt in to specific alerts, but prevents people without an existing account from opting in. For example, college students can sign up for alerts for their specific major.

CONCLUSION

Campuses of higher education institutions have many community members, including parents, contractors, conference attendees and sports fans. Colleges and universities send out campus-wide alerts when a critical event strikes. These notifications generally go out to students, faculty and other campus staff, but temporary visitors often don't receive them. And these institutions often struggle with how to communicate with temporary visitors.

There are many challenges preventing colleges and universities from communicating with visiting guests as part of their mass notification systems. By identifying who visits your campus often, customizing alerts for your various visitors, and including keywords and creating preset templates as part of your current emergency preparedness plans, you'll be able to protect everyone on campus and highlight your commitment to safety and preparedness to your entire campus community.

**Learn more about mass notification systems
and SMS Opt-In.**

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