

Vanderbilt University

Location: Nashville, TN
Enrollment: 16,500
Campus Type: Private
Campus Size: 340 Acres
Number of Buildings: 235

Overview

Located in the heart of Nashville, Tennessee, Vanderbilt University is a globally renowned private research university comprised of ten academic schools and 235 campus buildings, situated on three hundred and forty acres of land. Vanderbilt employs more than 9,500 faculty and staff members, and approximately 13,700 students are currently enrolled. Seventy-nine percent of their undergraduates live on campus in 28 residence halls and apartment buildings.

With a large total campus population located just a mile and a half from downtown Nashville, Vanderbilt is committed to campus safety and utilizes Alertus' unified mass notification system to reach their community members when an emergency strikes.

We spoke with Caitlyn Perry, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and Meteorologist; and Johnny Vanderpool, Director of the Office of Emergency Management, to learn more about Vanderbilt's experience with the Alertus System.

Challenge

The Department of Education requires institutions of higher education to provide timely warnings when emergencies pose a threat to faculty, staff, or student safety. To meet that mandate, Vanderbilt University launched the AlertVU system in the spring of 2007. "AlertVU is the university's Mass Emergency Communication system, designed to alert the campus community in the event of an emergency, or ongoing threat," said Perry.

"In the beginning, we worked with two vendors for a few years; however, we determined that we needed a





Alertus Desktop Notification can deliver a facility-wide emergency notification in a matter of seconds.

more comprehensive, robust system, to integrate the ever-increasing communication modalities,” added Vanderpool.

Network and Personal Notification Integration

By 2010, Vanderbilt decided to integrate the Alertus System with Everbridge to unify their mass notification. Alertus offers seamless integration between its facility-based mass notification solutions and Everbridge’s personal recipient notification software to enable centralized command and control of all notification assets under one platform.

Vanderbilt uses Everbridge to activate their Alertus system. When activated, Alertus sends Alertus Desktop™ Notifications to all computers on campus. “The desktop alert system is a reliable and robust communication modality that disseminates desktop messages to our campus community,” said Vanderpool.

Outdoor Notification Coverage

When a tornado occurred near Vanderbilt’s campus in the spring of 1998, the university began developing a weather mitigation strategy the following year. In 2014, Vanderbilt updated their outdoor warning system of seven public address speakers.

“Because of our long-standing relationship with Alertus, we decided to add the IP Text-to-Speech (TTS) interface to our existing outdoor voice system, designed to deliver both a voice and tone alert for tornado warnings,” said Vanderpool.

Vanderpool also added that each component of the Alertus System provides unique capabilities for how they disseminate their messaging. “Getting to leverage the Desktop Notification and the TTS Interface, and working directly with Alertus’ Technical Support Team, has developed a unique partnership.”



Alertus Text-to-Speech Interface provides clear spoken voice output of message text

Leveraging Vendor Technologies

On the importance of having a mass notification system, Perry said, “When seconds matter, it’s important to be able to send messages to as many people as possible in the least amount of time. Using Alertus allows us to send our message from Everbridge and know people will see it when it shows up on their computer screens. We don’t have to worry if they’ve uploaded their text or cell phone numbers.”

In conclusion, the Vanderbilt AlertVU system is a powerful communication platform, that leverages both the Alertus and Everbridge capabilities, into a single source platform and serves as a strategic component of the emergency preparedness initiatives at Vanderbilt University.