St. Paul's
Grammar School

Location: Cranebrook, New South Wales, Australia
Enrollment: 860 Students
Campus Type: Co-educational, Non-denominational Christian School
Campus Size: 70 Acres

St. Paul's Grammar School is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, nestled on a 70-acre campus in Cranebrook, a suburb of Sydney, Australia. The school was established in 1983 and is recognized as one of the best schools in the Penrith area offering enriching IB programs for K-12 students. To protect their students and staff, the school invested in the Alertus System to enhance their emergency mass communications.
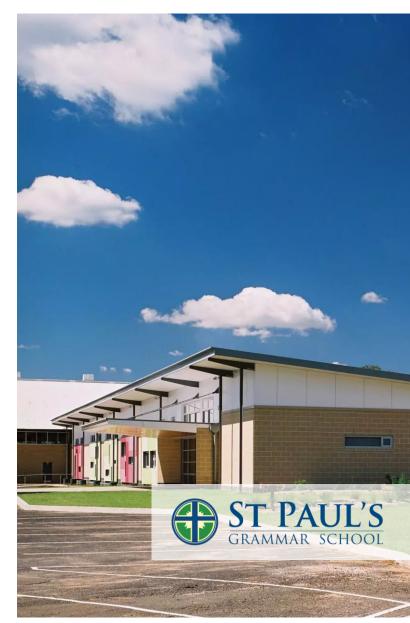
Challenges

"Before Alertus, the only notification system we had for emergencies were sirens that were operated by our intruder alarm system," said Justin Warner, Director of Information and Communication Technology at St. Paul's Grammar School. "This provided us with two different siren tones to communicate the start of either a lockdown or evacuation. However, this led to complicated processes for communicating messages such as an "all clear" after a lockdown – which combined the evacuation tone followed by the school bell. This wasn't particularly memorable for our staff and students and could result in confusion."

The school also experienced several false alarms in which an evacuation tone was sounded, but there wasn't an efficient way to communicate that it was false. These issues, coupled with a desire to add further scenarios to their emergency response and communicate them quickly, led them to research a better way to deliver critical context to users via computer screens during emergencies.

Solutions

Integration with the Alertus System
"We continue to rely on our intruder alarm system for broadscale audible notifications but we have integrated with Alertus such that if the system is triggered, it will initiate an alert from the Alertus System," said Warner. "When an alert is initiated from Alertus, it then triggers the appropriate audible siren tone. Our emergency response plan relies on messaging provided through Alertus, so it makes sense to initiate from there instead of distributing a general alert message, followed by a second one with additional detail."

ST PAUL'S
GRAMMAR SCHOOL

The school also has hardwired buttons in key locations to trigger one of two emergency scenarios, producing two distinct siren tones throughout the site that are connected to the Alertus System.

Alertus Safe In Seconds Initiative

Warner's team at St. Paul chose Alertus for their emergency notification needs when they became aware of Alertus' Safe-In-Seconds initiative, which provides free desktop alerting software to qualifying organizations.

"We wanted to incorporate desktop alerting into our emergency communication systems, so we did some investigation to find an appropriate solution and found that Alertus provides functionality and expertise in this area," said Warner. "Many other products we looked at provided it as an add-on to classroom management tools or didn't require the same level of robustness we wanted for an emergency communication tool. Once we discovered Alertus' grant program for schools, it made the decision for us."

Once they implemented the desktop alerting software, it became apparent that the platform could offer more flexibility in the way they managed emergencies if they expanded further.

"Integrating with our existing basic system allowed us to leverage what we had without the need to rip and replace," said Warner. "The addition of mobile notifications would allow us to ensure staff receive timely communication when away from a screen. Once we decided to implement the platform, new scenarios presented themselves where we've been able to utilize it for more specific scenarios."

"Our initial goal was to supplement our emergency response plan with desktop notifications, and Alertus absolutely delivered on this, to the point that key stakeholders were keen to explore how else it might enhance our emergency response. From there, we've slowly continued to expand the elements of our emergency communication that are driven out of Alertus and have been pleased with the level of flexibility and reliability it provides," he said. The school has also added Alertus Alert Beacons and a USB Panic Button within school grounds.

Robustness and Reliability

From an IT standpoint, Warner noted that it is refreshing to find strong products that provide consistent results. "In my experience to date, Alertus has been robust and reliable, which is critical for a product that handles emergencies. I haven't seen any other solutions that offer the same amount of flexibility in terms of activation scenarios and communication methods. For example, being able to send a mobile alert to key personnel if a weather RSS feed shows there will be strong winds, so they can respond accordingly."

Next Steps for Mass Notification

As for what's next, Warner's team says they are "considering Text-to-Speech alerting to move away from the current system for audible alerts and towards using public address so we can have more flexibility in how we communicate the context of emergency events, and we're looking to make activating emergency communication more accessible to the staff who need to be able to do that quickly."

"We're also looking at incorporating front-of-room classroom displays into the set of devices that can be targeted with messaging, but this is more of an in-house integration we're hoping to work through with the device manufacturer," he added.

Alertus Desktop™ Notification can deliver a facility-wide emergency notification with attention-grabbing full-screen overrides

The wall-mounted Alertus Alert Beacon® sounds, flashes, and displays an alert message in the event of an emergency

USB Panic Button enables one-touch, immediate incident reporting or system activation