

High-Volume Inbound IVR – Critical for Business Continuity

White Paper

Twenty First Century Communications

750 Communications Parkway

Columbus, Ohio 43214

800-382-8356

www.tfcci.com



Twenty First Century
Communications

Introduction

To most people, the terms “crisis communication” and “emergency notification” refer to phone calls, faxes, paging and e-mails – *outbound* messaging. And while outbound messaging is important in an emergency, inbound IVR (interactive voice response) can be even more critical.

Inbound telecommunication is commonly used to support, reinforce and follow up an outdial notification. Many organizations publish inbound telephone numbers which their associates can call for further information following a phone call, to receive status updates as the incident unfolds, or simply to replay the outdial message in case any information was missed.

However, there are far greater inbound capabilities available to support business continuity and incident response.

Inbound IVR can serve as a robust, self-service communication portal in and of itself. Organizations can gather information from employees using interactive survey functionality to determine their location, status, well-being, availability to support the response, or need of assistance. Using touch-tone responses, callers can leave messages, be transferred to live operators, or enter a Conference Bridge.

And perhaps even more importantly, it allows organizations to continue operations even in the event of a massive spike in inbound traffic to their call centers. Vendor-hosted or Software-as-a-Service providers are able to “host” their clients’ toll-free numbers on the *vendor’s* telecom platform. Thus, all call traffic, all interactive response, and all activity reporting reside on the *vendor’s* platform, and do not rely on the local infrastructure.

Inbound IVR

As recent events have demonstrated, telephone networks (both landline and cellular) are typically overloaded during a disaster – especially during its early stages. Pagers may not work and Internet access may be intermittent. Further complicating things is the fact that, because of the emergency, those individuals who need to be contacted may not be at their usual locations (home, office, job site, etc.), so it may not be possible to reach everyone using the typical outbound channels.

Inbound telecommunication makes *self-service notification* possible. Personnel and other key individuals can call into the system from any location for status updates as a situation unfolds. Staff members can call in to receive work assignments or relocation instructions.

Interactive survey programs enable the organization to authenticate callers by requiring them to enter an ID code before playing the message. Callers can also be required to confirm message receipt by entering a response after the message is played in full. The data from the call is immediately available to the organization’s administrators, who are able to remain updated regarding employees’ status.

Studies have shown that for every five outbound calls *two to three inbound confirmation calls can be triggered*. Thus, an outbound alert can generate a huge volume of inbound traffic to a call center,

disrupting operations and hindering emergency response efforts. A high-capacity, high-functionality inbound IVR system, like that offered by Twenty First Century Communications, can take *all* incoming calls without returning even one busy signal.

Vendor-hosted Communications

Onsite emergency notification systems, which consist of computer equipment housed in company facilities and licensed software that is integrated with local systems, come with an unavoidable inherent point of failure: they are just as vulnerable to disaster as the building in which they sit.

Additionally, their communication capacity, both inbound and outbound, is limited by local infrastructure. Their calling capacity will never exceed the number of telephone lines coming in and out of that in-house VRU equipment. Voice response units are simply computers, having 24 lines, or ports, where 23 are voice ports and one is for data. Each VRU is only able to pump out only about a thousand 60-second calls per hour, or to receive only that amount of inbound calls per hour.

The advantage of a hosted emergency notification system is that the vendor's telecom platform is equipped with thousands of voice response units, with tens of thousands of ports. Hosted systems can offer exclusive ports slated for simultaneous inbound call-handling, so they are able to send *and* receive hundreds of thousands of calls simultaneously.

Most onsite equipment has a useful life of about three years before it will need to be replaced. Since these software systems are licensed and locally installed, upgrades and new versions will need to be purchased from the vendor on a regular basis. These systems must be maintained by the client, requiring the 24/7 availability of client IT personnel, all of whom have received extensive training on the system.

In the event of a disaster that disables the machine, or the building in which it sits, a total system replacement will be required. This means that, just at the moment when it is needed most, your system is down. And it won't be up again until replacement hardware and software can be shipped by the vendor and installed by your personnel.

Vendor-hosted systems, like that of Twenty First Century Communications, are housed, maintained and updated completely by the provider. They are monitored, tested, patched and upgraded by the vendor, and are constantly up and running. Because they are accessed and utilized over the Internet, they are always available to the client, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. In the event the client loses its building or cannot access the Internet, a simple call to a toll-free help line is answered by the provider for 24/7/365 technical support.

Voice response units can be configured with outbound or inbound ports. With onsite systems, the capacity is limited and local. With hosted systems, the capacity is massive and geographically dispersed across a broad, redundant telecom platform. Outbound calls are launched from locations across the United States, well away from the site of the disaster. Inbound calls are terminated and processed on the vendor's VRU ports, again not tying up the client's local network.

Thus, hosted systems do not rely on local telecom infrastructure to function. They allow organizations to process thousands of calls in minutes, and keep local lines open enabling operations to continue operations and respond to the incident at hand.

Applications for inbound IVR

The inbound capability available with a solution like Twenty First Century's can also be used to create a virtual operations center of operations "on the fly." When the City of Nashville was hit by a tornado that put its municipal building and call center out of commission, the city transferred all incoming calls to Twenty First Century. TFCC relayed one message to those attempting to contact city services and a separate message to those reporting power outages. Life-threatening emergency calls were redirected to other lines as appropriate. The result was seamless communications which enabled the city personnel to focus on emergency response while citizens received the information and services they needed.

When hurricanes hit the U.S. Gulf Coast, oil producer Shell Oil goes into "crisis mode." Associates are instructed to call the company's published toll-free inbound telephone number and go through the prompts to report their whereabouts, well-being, and whether they are in need of assistance. Calls are routed to TFCC's platform where they are processed by Shell's TFCC-hosted employee accountability program. All the information collected in the calls is automatically processed by the system and displayed in real-time reports on the company's TFCC web portal.

Instances like these clearly demonstrate the fundamental necessity of inbound telecommunication, and emphasize the importance of complete two-way crisis communications capabilities. Only experienced communications solutions providers like Twenty First Century can give organizations the high volume inbound call handling capacity they need to be up, running and communicating whenever the need arises.

Use Inbound IVR for:

- Information hotlines
- Event status updates
- Inbound call filtering, transfer and redirect
- Inbound staff notification
- Employee accountability
- Continuity of operations
- Current situation updates
- Evacuation routes/ instructions
- Product recall alerts
- Media communications
- Support of outdial notifications
- Call filtering and segmentation
- Intelligent agent routing

A Twenty First Century Solution

The **Crisis Communications System (CRISCOM)** offered by Twenty First Century Communications is a fully hosted Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solution that can be used to quickly reach any number of individuals or groups. TFCC's cost-effective automated solutions assist organizations in conserving resources, as they do not require the purchase of any additional equipment, software, licenses, or phone lines. There is no maintenance required on the part of the client nor are there fees for upgrades.

Twenty First Century offers simultaneous outdial and toll-free inbound calling capability. In fact, TFCC accesses the largest telecommunications platform in North America. Using both inbound and outbound programs, the system can perform a simple broadcast, or it can poll contacts to collect information. It also includes a real-time customizable reporting function which tracks call results in whatever terms are appropriate for the situation.

The system provides targeted messaging with an unlimited number of possible scenarios, messages, recipients, and groups. Also, Geo-coded Mapping can be used to designate notification areas on a web-based map. The system will identify the residents and businesses in that area, generate phone numbers, and deliver notifications or instructions. Messages can be pre-recorded for later use, created on the fly, and/or changed as the situation unfolds.

Twenty First Century's systems are fully web-accessed, with 24/7/365 availability, remote activation capability, and toll-free live technical support.

Whatever the likelihood or frequency of natural disasters, the absolute truth is that they will occur. The critical key to response and recovery, from best to worst case scenario, is communication: getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

For more information about Twenty First Century Communications and its technologies, please visit: www.tfcci.com.