

Mesa Community College

Location: Mesa, AZ
Campus Type: large city
Enrollment: 25,960
Faculty: 1,160
Campus Size: 140 acres
Building Count: 50

Along with threats usually facing large, urban campuses, Mesa Community College has to contend with challenges unique to a non-residential campus. Everyday, thousands of students, faculty, and non-college affiliated individuals are constantly flowing on and off campus. With so many people to keep track of each day in a large urban local, public safety officials at the college have a lot on their plates. After two armed intruder incidents, Mesa Community College decided it was time to search for a better notification system.

Challenge

Surrounded by a large mall, a hospital, freeways, multi-building housing, and apartments, Mesa Community College is truly at the epicenter of numerous urban threats. In addition to the thousands of students and staff arriving and leaving each day due to the college's non-residential status, individuals not associated with Mesa Community College frequently enter the campus. With so many potential threats looming over Mesa Community College daily, public safety officials at the college sought an emergency notification solution capable of quickly relaying clear directions to students and faculty during emergencies.



Steve Corich, Mesa Community College's director of public safety, discusses the college's unique challenge and solution.

A Simple Notification Solution

When I took the job back in 2002, I was in put charge of looking at our campus emergency preparedness issues. Early on we discovered that we lacked a way to, in a timely manner, notify our college population in the event of an emergency. So we looked at several different possibilities, and we went with a VoIP notification system. When Alertus contacted us and demonstrated the system for us, we were really impressed with the technology. We had numerous areas where the VoIP notification just wasn't effective, and Alertus really fit into our plans to create a solid, redundant notification system.



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

Mesa Community College is a non-residential community college, meaning no students live on campus. There's a huge amount of students and faculty coming on and off the campus everyday, which makes it hard to keep track of everyone at Mesa Community College.

I think a big notification challenge for us is the aspect of training students and staff about our emergency systems. Since we're a two-year college, we have students that could only be here for a year, and then they're gone. The Alertus system is so easy to understand that it really only takes students and faculty a few minutes to know how it works, and more importantly, how to respond to it during an emergency.

Armed Intruder Incidents

A couple of years prior to Alertus and the VoIP notifications, we had two incidents over a short period of time where an armed individual came onto campus. We encountered a couple of problems. With only a few VoIP notification phones at the time, we were only able to notify a small portion of the campus. Without clear instructions, people just didn't know what to do.

If we had just had the Alertus system in place, the word would've gone out much more quickly. We realized that we couldn't count on just one notification system, especially when we didn't have full campus coverage. The only way to prevent a situation like that from escalating is to provide the entire campus with clear directions during the event.

Complete Notification Coverage

You're really reaching out to everyone with Alertus. You're even going to notify the disabled and the hard of hearing. The strobe lights attract attention to the Alert Beacons so people know to get more details from the LCD display. We set up the Alert Beacons in locations where we can't reach individuals with VoIP alerts—large meeting rooms, gyms, dance rooms, all three floors of our library, etc. With Alertus, we know the Alert Beacons will attract attention. The digital signage is easy to read so that no matter what, even with disabled students, every individual is going to be notified. We get a lot more notification coverage on our campus with Alertus.



Alertus' digital signage override software transforms digital signage and cable TV systems into intelligent emergency alerting appliances, and when activated, emergency alerts scroll across digital signage and can be easily read from a distance.

I was pleasantly surprised at the cost to install the Alertus system on our campus. Compared to other systems that we were looking at that offered different alternatives, the Alertus system was a real bargain for us. Having Alertus tied into our campus-wide television system so the alert flashes up on the TV screens really gave us more, bang for our buck as far as reaching more people on campus during an emergency.

We also use the digital signage override. Since we already had digital signage on campus that was connected to our media server, we decided to connect those to the Alertus server. It really added value to what we already had on campus. We have about 25 or 30 TVs now, and we're installing more every week. Now when the Alertus system goes off, the alert scrolls across every TV on campus.

A Notification System That's Easy to Use

It's so easy to get people acquainted with the Alertus system and interface, even non-IT people. When we demonstrate Alertus it takes all of 5–10 minutes. People are always amazed at how quickly it can be configured, how quickly the notifications go out, and how simple it is to operate.

It really doesn't take too much for someone to understand the Alertus system, in part just because it's so easy to use. The box itself is pretty small; it's inconspicuous until it's activated. At first, people don't really understand what Alertus is. Then we show it to them, and it's just like a light goes on in their head; they instantly know what we're trying to do for them with the Alertus system at Mesa Community College.

Creating a Safe Environment

I think the biggest benefit of Alertus for a campus community is peace of mind. Giving your employees and your students the feeling that you're taking their safety seriously, and showing them that you have devices, processes, and procedures in place to protect them really raises perception around the campus that it's a safer environment.

Knowing that we have these tools at our fingertips and that our trained employees can notify the entire campus in just a matter of minutes, really gives me confidence as a director of public safety. I honestly haven't seen any other systems capable of what Alertus can do. Quite frankly, once we were sold on the Alertus system, we stopped looking for anything else; I still haven't seen anything that's comparable.