

Two-way paging for the fire services

Paging is a continually evolving sector of the mobile communications industry. It plays a vital role in helping to initiate and coordinate an effective emergency response. Here Chris Jones, CEO of PageOne, outlines how the recent launch of two-way paging in the UK will ensure this continues to be the case.



Chris Jones, CEO of PageOne, says that two-way paging boosts the role of paging in an effective communications strategy.

The fire service is facing an increased variety of demanding situations many of which also require the support of specialist groups such as County Urban Search and Rescue teams and the British Red Cross fire-victims support service. Therefore it needs a communications infrastructure in place that won't let firefighters and administrators down at the very time it is needed most.

The advent of the two-way paging service that PageOne has just launched will boost the role of paging as part of an emergency and incident management response. A number of emergency sector organisations are trialling two-way paging already and the initial feedback has been excellent. As the two-way pager combines the speed, reliability and broadcast ability of paging, with the auto acknowledgement and response of GSM, organisations are immediately recognising the benefits that this technology can bring, as a key component of an efficient and effective emergency response.

By introducing the response element to traditional broadcast messaging, two-way paging very effectively "closes the communication loop", giving fire service administrators the ability to determine if and when firefighters have received a message; if the message has been read; and if the person can respond. This vital feedback is further enhanced by the ability of the two-way pager to report its location as well, giving the command and control centre all the important information needed to manage an incident quickly and efficiently. In addition, all this information is logged and provides a full audit trail of messaging events for later review. This frees up administrators from having to compile this information themselves, enabling them to instead dedicate their time to actively co-ordinating the response. In comparison with SMS the two-way paging service delivers more reporting information through the

message read status, and for the first time the fire services can target messaging based on locality as well as availability.

Paging has always played an important role in providing fire and rescue services with a resilient, robust and reliable solution for real-time broadcast messaging. For example, in the aftermath of the extensive floods that engulfed large areas of Gloucestershire (UK) during July 2007, mobile phone networks failed to cope with the sudden surge in demand. However, Hampshire FRS was able to rely on PageOne's paging network when electricity power substations were being flooded and the USAR team needed to be quickly deployed to help lift in pumping systems.

Essex Fire Service has integrated PageOne's solution with its own control system to facilitate the process of sending out various specialist groups to incidents across the country. This has led to a much more joined-up emergency response and enables Essex firefighters to immediately dispatch volunteers who can help with issues such as arranging alternative accommodation for those affected by a disaster.

The addition of two-way, location-aware services further boosts the role that paging can play in an effective communications strategy and enhances the contribution that administrators can make in enabling firefighters to do their job effectively on the front line. That is why it is a solution that all fire services should carefully consider when researching or revising their critical communications requirements to better prepare themselves for the communication challenges of the 21st century.

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