Customer Insights Survey
Hurricane Sandy’s Impact & Lessons Learned

Hurricane Sandy caused widespread damage and serious economic disruption in 24 states from Florida to Maine and as far inland as Wisconsin, with the worst damage in New Jersey and New York. Also known as “Superstorm Sandy” and “Frankenstorm” because it later merged with other storm systems, Sandy formed October 22, peaked as a Category 2 storm, and spanned 1,100 miles in diameter before dissipating on October 31, 2012, over the Northeastern U.S. and Canada.

*The Wall Street Journal* estimates that insured loss payouts will likely reach $10-20 billion and that the total cost of the superstorm will likely fall between $30-50 billion.¹ More recent estimates put it at $63 billion.² Nearly 5 million homes were without power. Thousands of homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed by the superstorm, displacing as many as 60,000 people.³ This heavy toll puts Hurricane Sandy second only to Hurricane Katrina in terms of economic impact. 131 American lives were lost and 253 total lives lost to Sandy across 7 countries.

As a company dedicated to helping schools, businesses, and governments plan for and respond to emergencies, Omnilert conducts post-event assessments whenever a major emergency like this occurs. It’s one of the best ways to find new and better ways to serve our customers. A survey of 2,576 e2Campus and Amerilert customers was conducted November 2-15, 2012, using Survey Monkey’s online research application. 164 customers participated in the survey and this report summarizes the highlights of their collective wisdom.

Hurricane Sandy’s Impact

- **Indirect or no effect**: 50.3%
- **Significant and continuing disruptions**: 6.8%
- **Significant disruptions during the storm; minor aftereffects**: 19.3%
- **Minor disruptions**: 23.6%

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³ *The Daily Beast*, “What to Do With the Thousands Displaced by Hurricane Sandy?” November 8, 2012.
* 164 customers participated in the survey.
“We Were Lucky!”

About half of the customers who responded to this survey (50.3%) were either unaffected by the storm or only indirectly affected. Many of them noted that they are located in Texas, parts of the Midwest, or on the West Coast that were largely beyond the reach of the high winds and storm surge. Some reported relatively minor wind and rain. Indirect affects of the storm were primarily related to transportation issues and difficulty reaching business partners and colleagues in affected areas.

Others, even in the exceptionally broad path of the storm, escaped with little or no impact. “We prepared, however, the wave surge was less than a normal winter storm. We were lucky!” Several customers told us they were prepared for the worst and fortunate to experience little impact.

Not So Lucky

The other half of the respondents (49.7%) told us that they experienced disruptions of varying degrees as a result of the storm. Fortunately, about half of these (23.6%) experienced only minor disruptions during the storm and just 6.8% reported significant and continuing major disruptions. The remaining 19.3% experienced major disruptions during the storm but minor aftereffects.

Where Sandy struck, the numbers of people affected tended to be large. Of the customers who told us they were impacted by the storm, about half (50.6%) had more than 1,000 people affected. A significant 17.7% had 5,000 or more of their people affected by storm disruptions.

The most serious lingering disruptions were caused by flooding, water leaks, and extended power outages. “We lost power to the campus for 72 hours with 150 students in residence.” Another respondent reported that 60 staff had to be relocated during the drying out process for buildings that were flooded and water damaged during the storm. One school reported having to evacuate students; another remained closed for a week due to roof damage.

The most commonly reported minor disruptions were closures—most frequently 2-3 days, but a few reported as many as 5 days. Power outages, heavy weather and transportation problems were most commonly cited as minor disruptions affecting customers during the storm.
“This emergency actually helped us in terms of understanding our roles in a real emergency. We coordinated with our internal ESF’s and our regional and state partners throughout the storm.”

The Silver Lining: Better Preparedness

Hurricane Sandy’s test strengthened several respondents’ emergency planning programs. One customer who reported minor disruptions during the storm explained, “This emergency actually helped us in terms of understanding our roles in a real emergency. We coordinated with our internal ESF’s and our regional and state partners throughout the storm.”

Over and over, customers told us that advance preparation and clear communications paid off. “Deliberate planning over many years with table top exercises and early response prior to the storm, during and after (recovery) lessened damage. Active communication with our campus community throughout the storm was seen as a positive by all.”

Several schools, businesses, and government agencies outside the affected area told us they used the event to review their own emergency preparedness processes.

One explained, “We took the opportunity to put the storm information into drills and training scenarios for our Emergency Management Advisory Meeting.” Another noted, “This emergency reminds us how important it is to prepare for a major emergency and it prompts us to have drills that could prepare us for an emergency of that magnitude.”

It’s great when all the preparation comes together for a successful outcome: “Our emergency response team handled everything thrown at them in a timely and effective manner, from student evacuations and temporary housing for students to feeding them, and even having entertainment.”

Another proudly shared, “The level of cooperation by all of the students and faculty was noteworthy. It makes me confident that we can face another event of this type.”

Outstanding preparation and communication to keep people safe and connected goes beyond just work and school related communication: “We also alerted staff and helped them plan for personal preparedness.”

Successfully caring for your people is a role for everyone, not just the emergency team. “Our HR and executive team reached out to employees to make sure they were okay or needed assistance.”

And, sometimes you get unexpectedly lucky: “Amazing.... found commercial generators to be delivered and was running again by Friday, 4 days after the storm.”
Lessons Learned

Be prepared. Be very prepared. Over and over, customers emphasized the need for thorough preparation – not just for likely outcomes, but also for unexpected outcomes. “It was a comforting feeling knowing we were prepared actually waiting for the storm rather than scrambling at the last minute.”

Predefine contingencies. What if power goes out for longer than anticipated? What if cell service and telephone lines are down? What if you have no building or home to return to? If the primary organizer is unreachable or injured, who will the alternates be? If plan A and plan B go awry, what’s plan C? Knowing the alternatives in advance can help things go much smoother in emergencies.

Take forecasts seriously. Even with modern science and satellites storms can be somewhat unpredictable, so make sure you are prepared for both best and worst case predictions. It helps to establish reliable relationships in advance with local emergency management to make sure you have access to up-to-date information and can coordinate if necessary as storms progress.

Update your data. When the power, phones or cable systems go out, it’s too late to update everyone’s contact information. Make sure you have everyone on the emergency team’s contact information in both electronic and paper formats. Strongly encourage all employees and students to update their information and make note of communication options before an emergency occurs.

Having everyone’s text, cell, email, and landline contact information gives you multiple communication options. “Make 100% sure you have everyone’s contact information, most importantly text contact info because cell service was next to none and landlines were out of service.”

Secure materials and supplies in advance. “The more you can do before the bad event happens then the easier it will be to deal with. At first notice, get supplies if you don’t have them already. Items went off the shelves in a hurry and if you went late then you missed out.” Having food, water, batteries, supplies, generators, and other equipment in place before a disaster makes preparing and recovering much faster and easier.

Spring into action quickly. In addition to helping keep people safe during a disaster, preparing for a fast response afterward can help mitigate damage and get your organization up and running sooner. “Having a skeleton crew and police walking the buildings during the storm and immediately addressing and scheduling the repair work beginning the following morning [helped us aggressively mitigate] the water damage, pulling up carpet, interstitial wall drying…”

Encourage personal preparedness. According to FEMA, “The First 72 is Up to You.” Realistically communities and citizens may need to take responsibility for themselves for the first three to four days after a disaster. Weather challenges can delay emergency crew deployment. Even when crews are deployed immediately, it can often take days for them to triage and address all of the issues in an area. Personal preparedness helps keep your people safe.

Clear, simple and frequent communications. Communicating early and often makes it easier to keep students, parents, employees, and communities informed before, during and after the storm. Anticipate power outages and broadcast communications early before they impact your ability to send or your employees’ and students’ ability to receive updates. Make it easy for people to call in or log in remotely if their other forms of communication fail. Be sure to update often so recipients feel confident that they have the latest information.
Tailor messages to the medium. Post complex instructions online or make them available via call-in hotlines. Multi-part SMS messages can be confusing and may not be delivered sequentially; keep them simple and reserve long text for email. Custom recorded voice messages are clearer and easier to understand than computer generated voice messages. “Have message templates already created in your system that you can work off of, or meet a few days in advance of knowing about a forecast of severe weather to determine specific procedures for different departments for that specific emergency.”

Multimodal options are crucial. “Don’t rely solely on electronic communication—some parents lost the ability to receive text messages. We will be sure to maintain an emergency call-in number in the future. We also learned that the timing of emergency messages is very important, and that communications should be kept simple, and be tailored to the appropriate audience.” Diverse broadcast options are essential. Social media like Twitter and Facebook are easy to access and reach wide audiences.

Going beyond everyday communications, several respondents also opted to send simultaneous desktop alerts and posted warnings on beacons and digital signage. Another recommended testing 2-way radio transmissions to keep emergency teams connected when power generators run out at cell towers. The more modes you can quickly and easily access in a crisis, the better.

Don’t panic. You cannot predict, prevent, or control every possible problem in an emergency, but if your team is well-prepared and works together, have faith that overall things will probably work out okay. “Just buck up and deal with it. Chances are, it won’t be the end of the world.” Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Don’t panic. Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

“Make timely decisions and use multiple means of communication.”

“Communities and citizens need to take responsibility for themselves for the first three days after a disaster.”
Customers Shine During Sandy

Throughout Hurricane Sandy, Omnilert customers relied on our services to get critical messages to their stakeholders. During the four-day height of the storm, the services averaged at least one new subscriber every second. Our cloud-based, geographically-redundant network sent an important broadcast about once every two minutes.

Keeping stakeholders up to date on the latest storm-related developments helped our customers shine during Hurricane Sandy. Nearly 80% reported that their communities were very satisfied or satisfied with their communications during the emergency. Of course even when things go according to plan, managing emergency communications can be a thankless job – about 15% did not receive feedback from users about their satisfaction with communications during the storm.

Community Satisfaction with Communications During Sandy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all satisfied</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No feedback received</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
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</tbody>
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The Omnilert Network performed exceedingly well during the storm. A few client administrators contacted Omnilert customer service for support. Those that did quickly reached a live person to help them handle anything that came up. Overall, 93.2% of the respondents who were directly affected by the storm told us that the system performance was excellent or very good.

Customer Satisfaction with e2Campus and Amerilert

* Satisfaction ratings of customers affected by Superstorm Sandy.
Appendix: Survey Instrument

About the Survey

This survey of 2,576 e2Campus and Amerilert customers was conducted online November 2-15, 2012, using the Survey Monkey’s online research application. The data was collected via the application. 164 customers participated in the survey.

1) How significantly did Hurricane Sandy impact your organization?
   - Significant and continuing major disruption
   - Major disruption during the storm and minor aftereffects
   - Minor disruption during the storm
   - Indirect disruptions
   - No effect

2) Please describe in your own words how this emergency impacted your organization.

3) How many people in your organization were impacted by the storm?
   - 100 or less
   - 101-1000
   - 1001-5000
   - 5001 -10000
   - 10001+

4) What successes can you share regarding your team’s response to the storm?

5) Which of our services did you use to help manage the emergency? (select all the apply)
   - 1-uAlert (mass notification)
   - 2-uConference (teleconference virtual situation room)
   - 3-uTip (community tipping system)
   - 4-Hotline (recorded emergency message hotline)

6) After this experience, what advice do you have for others who might face a similar emergency in the future?

7) How well did e2Campus/Amerilert perform during this emergency?
   - 5 – Excellent
   - 4
   - 3
   - 2
   - 1 – Poor

8) How satisfied was your community with your communications during this emergency?
   - 5 – Very satisfied
   - 4
   - 3
   - 2
   - 1 – Not at all satisfied
   - No feedback received

9) What could e2Campus/Amerilert do to help make the next emergency easier for you and your team?

10) Please enter your email address to receive a copy of the report.