

Blackboard Connect™ & Somerville, MA



City Sees Immediate ROI through Innovative Technology

New England's most densely populated city, Somerville, MA, is re-inventing itself as a vibrant urban center. The City of Somerville has taken the lead in many innovative local government initiatives, including the use of new notification technologies to inform and assist its community. Notably, the city chose to replace its hardware communication system with the Blackboard Connect service to better ensure rapid notification of its citizenry.

Problem: Auto-dialer System Outdated and Vulnerable

Having seen the proven performance of the Blackboard Connect service demonstrated in Somerville's schools, Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone quickly envisioned how his city might benefit from the service, built exclusively for the needs of local government.

As part of their dedication to improving their overall communications structure, Somerville's leaders decided to replace their outdated auto-dialer system with a service offering greater ease of use, access from any location, and more robust communication features. The Blackboard Connect service chosen by Somerville provided fundamental advantages

over their previous, hardware-based notification system.

Typically, site-based systems are configured for either large applications, such as tele-marketing, or small applications, such as calling staff. Consequently, such systems lack the flexibility to reach both small and large groups efficiently.

Autodialer systems can quickly become over-taxed when unforeseen incidents occur. This can be especially problematic where cities share PBX lines with autodialers. Further, hardware-reliant, site-based systems are vulnerable to multiple points of failure, including local power outages.

"Somerville is a regional leader in using cost-effective technology to improve communication between local government and the people we serve. [Blackboard Connect] is the logical next step."

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor,
City of Somerville, MA



Blackboard

Time Required by Auto-dialer to Deliver a 30-Second Message

Calls	5,000	10,000	15,000	20,000	30,000	40,000	50,000
8 Ports	10.42 hrs	20.83 hrs	31.25 hrs	41.67 hrs	62.50 hrs	83.33 hrs	104.17 hrs
16 Ports	5.21 hrs	10.42 hrs	15.63 hrs	20.83 hrs	31.25 hrs	41.67 hrs	52.08 hrs
24 Ports	3.47 hrs	6.94 hrs	10.42 hrs	13.89 hrs	20.83 hrs	27.78 hrs	34.72 hrs
48 Ports	1.74 hrs	3.47 hrs	5.21 hrs	6.94 hrs	10.42 hrs	13.89 hrs	17.36 hrs
96 Ports	0.87 hrs	1.74 hrs	2.60 hrs	3.47 hrs	5.21 hrs	6.94 hrs	8.68 hrs

It can typically take hours for a high volume message sent by an auto-dialer to reach its intended recipients.

By contrast, as a Web-based SaaS (Software as a Service), Blackboard Connect allows civic leaders to send personalized voice messages to tens of thousands of people in minutes with the capacity to reach small and large groups simultaneously – with no risk of disruption when you need it most.

Autodialer systems are designed to provide communication between two points and are dependent on the number of phone lines they can access. Consequently, it can take hours for a single call sent by an autodialer to reach its recipients. That may be sufficient for telemarketing, but not when time messages must be communicated quickly and reliably.

Solution: Blackboard Connect

One more important advantage helped convince Somerville’s leadership to upgrade from an on-site system to Blackboard Connect: the service offers no preset limits for one low annual fee, while their previous system charged on a per call basis when initiating a time-sensitive call.

“We live in uncertain times and we need the ability to communicate quickly and effectively with the public... I believe that our citizens will benefit directly from having this new channel of communication.”

Dennis M. Sullivan
Alderman at Large
City of Somerville, MA

With Blackboard Connect, the city gained the ability to test and fine tune its communications as necessary, with lower set up costs, greater speed, and improved ease of use.

Somerville's city leaders put the Blackboard Connect service to immediate use. Since deploying the service in May of 2006, the city has scheduled, sent and tracked approximately four times the number of messages it sent using its previous system — sending over 230,000 calls for a appreciable return on investment.

Result: A Better Way to Keep Constituents Informed

As a fully hosted SaaS solution, the Blackboard Connect service allows local government to deploy a complete time-based notification system quickly and easily. Most importantly, the Blackboard Connect service addresses the changing needs of cities, towns, and counties nationwide by providing a cost-efficient, easy-to-use system that can be used from any location at any time.

Had the city sent that volume of messages using its previous system — at an average cost per call of \$0.25 — it is easy to see how one unforeseen situation could quickly deplete their entire budget.

Most importantly, however, the City of Somerville gained the capability via the Blackboard Connect service to send personalized voice messages to thousands of people in minutes from any location using just a telephone — without having to invest in or maintain hardware, software or additional phone lines.

As communities across the USA evaluate “X-1-1” resources, it is important to note that Blackboard Connect is designed to augment, support and compliment existing communications. Its capabilities offer unparalleled benefits, particularly when urgent situations occur.

With Blackboard Connect, the city of Somerville is better prepared to provide its citizens with accurate, up-to-date information quickly and easily.

“[Blackboard Connect] will revolutionize communications for snow emergencies and other public safety announcements.

Because every number and e-mail address is coded by latitude and longitude, you can also send messages to designated sections of the city, so residents can be notified of fires, accidents and other localized emergencies.”

Robert C. Trane
*Vice President, Somerville
Board of Aldermen
City of Somerville, MA*