RAVE
MOBILE SAFETY

Rave Alert's™ SMS Opt-In Helps Virginia Beach Notify Festival Attendees

VB
City of
Virginia Beach

STATE & LOCAL SOLUTIONS
Rave Alert™

Virginia Beach is the largest city in Virginia, with over **440,000** residents and around **19 million** visitors each year.

THE CHALLENGE

Virginia Beach is no stranger to large crowds. This seaside community in Southeastern Virginia welcomes millions of tourists each year, drawn to the city's sandy beaches, 3-mile long boardwalk, and numerous shops and museums.

However, Virginia Beach safety officials knew the city would be receiving more visitors than usual for the first-ever Something in the Water festival. Stretching across three days in April, the festival was created by producer/rapper (and Virginia Beach native) Pharrell Williams and featured a huge lineup of musical acts. When the festival sold out of its 35,000 tickets, it became clear to those in charge of public safety that a reliable and dynamic emergency messaging system was crucial.

"We have over 700 special events throughout the year," said Erin Sutton, director of the city's Office of Emergency Management. "We deal with severe weather, road closures and schedule changes that are difficult to communicate widely throughout the city unless folks have subscribed to the traditional alert system. We needed a way to use mass notification more dynamically, which would provide us with a greater ability to keep our visitors safe."

THE SOLUTION

With Rave Alert, known in Virginia Beach as VBAlert, festival attendees in Virginia Beach had the option of texting a keyword to a short code that would automatically sign them up for emergency alerts. Messages sent to these temporary visitors were set to automatically expire on a specific date so attendees would stop receiving alerts after the festival ended.

"Something in the Water was the city's first time using the opt-in feature," said Stephen Williams, director of Emergency Communications and Citizens Services. By promoting a short SMS Opt-in code in communication leading up to the event and throughout the festival, Williams and his team were able to ensure they could message many festival attendees.

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19 MILLION

tourists each year.

According to Williams, being able to notify people at the festival was vital.

"Part of the struggle with mass notification today is that although you can share information using a variety of tools, like on social media, not everyone subscribes to a single platform," he said. "So, it was very valuable to be able to send official notices from the city and use a set keyword that expired after the event so that we didn't need to manually delete anyone from the system afterwards."

THE RESULT

The team ended up finding value in many of Rave Alert's features as they rolled it out just in time for Something in the Water.

"On Friday, we had severe weather," said Williams. "The system sent out tornado warnings and severe thunderstorm warnings automatically to the citizens and festival attendees. During the event I was actually able to easily send out alerts from my iPhone while at the festival."

In addition to severe weather warnings, the team used Rave Alert to get the word out about other developments that impacted festival goers, including road closures and parking advisories.

Rave Alert didn't just help safety efforts during the festival. It also provided a way for the team to poll attendees about their experience after Something in the Water ended. The poll received around 1,700 responses in just 12 hours, providing the team with valuable information that could help improve future events.

Additionally, Rave Alert's reporting capabilities allowed the team to pinpoint what worked and what required attention before the city's next major event.

According to Sutton, all these capabilities were crucial for a city like Virginia Beach that receives millions of tourists each year. She said that this is something that other communities need to keep in mind when considering mass notification systems.

"Make sure when you are doing your mass notification planning that you consider your visitor population that may not be aware of the ability to sign up for your traditional alert system," she said. "Having the capability to do targeted messaging related to a special event will only increase a city's preparedness."

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STEPHEN WILLIAMS
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