

FAO: Thomas Warner
Organisation: Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
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Dear Thomas,

RE: DEVELOPMENT BOARD UPDATE: PHONE ISSUE 15/05/14
COMMERCIALY CONFIDENTIAL, PLEASE TREAT AS RESTRICTED

I am writing to you to let you know about a technical problem we experienced on Thursday 15th May with delivering Voice messages and to assure you that we have taken steps to ensure that it will not happen again.

What happened?

One of our police partners sent an un-optimised, low priority (5), telephone message to over 11,000 voice recipients. This was a perfectly legitimate message but was to a large distribution (even for our system) and, as it was not marked as an emergency message (priority 1), took longer than usual to distribute through standard low priority channels (we use four times as many lines to deliver high priority calls).

This particular scenario had not been encountered before and unearthed a flaw with the technical processes in place to deliver the calls.

We have systems in place which check if users have received (answered), acknowledged (pressed key 1), or replied (pressed key 3) to a message before we try to re-try the call. Unfortunately in this case, as we had caused a queue in the telecoms systems, the process we use to check if a call had been delivered was delayed so we continued to try and deliver the message.

The result, was that the system repeatedly tried to deliver voice messages send between 13:00 and 17:00 on Thursday 15th May, up to five times and in some cases up to as late as 23:30 that night.

Who did it affect?

Voice call recipients in Dorset (mainly), Lincolnshire and Bedfordshire.

What did we do?

Our telecoms provider and engineers, who operate 24 hour cover, became aware that calls were being made after our usual watershed of 21:00. After some investigation, they identified the problem and at 22:00 a VISAV director was called out who was made aware and, at 22:30, authorised a full stop of all calls as soon as we had established that these were not emergency calls. Unfortunately some calls were queued in the various telecoms systems beyond our control and were still delivered (up to an hour later in the worst case).

Around 100 users replied to the voice message and/or email and through the night we responded to every user that had an email address with an explanation and full apology.

In the days since the incident, we have conducted a thorough investigation and identified the several issues which enabled this incident to happen. I should point out that since May 2014 we have delivered over 16,000 voice messages to over 2 million recipients and this has never happened before.

What have we done to prevent this happening again?

We have now added safeguards which will prevent messages of this magnitude being sent out by the system (unless in emergencies). We have also undertaken some priority work with our telecoms partners to add further safeguards to the system at their end, to ensure that repeat and late calls cannot be made. We have some further work planned to prevent an administrator from inadvertently sending a huge low priority message unless they fully intend to. The actual measures are defined below:

- 1) Added a system update to prevent any message being sent out by an administrator to more than 600 voice call recipients. Note: The administrator can split the message into smaller distribution lists if required and this only applies to voice call recipients (not text or email) **Status: Launched**
- 2) Prioritised [BWR 34: Financial Limit](#) which will enable the above measure to be replaced with a more controlled method of restricting voice and text distribution per administrator. **Status: Due 10th June 2014.**
- 3) Increased the number of channels we use to distribute low priority voice calls from 60 to 320 to enable rapid distribution of calls which will prevent a queue. **Status: Done**
- 4) Agreed an upgrade in the system between Alert and the telecoms system to enable Alert to be aware of and control any queue caused by Alert or any other system load. This will completely prevent any calls being added to a queue, retried unnecessarily or being made outside of a user's preferred times. **Status: Due by 10th June**

One of the elements highlighted by this large telephone call was the number of people who would prefer to receive low level information by email rather than by telephone or text message. With this in mind, our next system admin message will include a short reminder about how users can change the priority level of the messages they receive. VISAV will also provide administrative support for this process.

Is it fixed?

The combination of reducing the maximum number of voice calls to less than 600 and increasing our channel capacity fourfold means that a call queue of the same magnitude cannot be recreated (even if all licensees create a large voice message at the same time).

This "perfect storm" scenario had been removed and the problem will not reoccur.

The further planned developments outlined above (items 2 and 4) will further safeguard this as the system grows.

Sorry

I am sure you can imagine that we are all disappointed to report this incident and we apologise to everyone concerned. I hope you can see that we have acted as promptly and

professionally as possible to resolve the issue during the incident and have taken further steps to prevent a reoccurrence.

We are, herein, advising every Dev Board member and lead practitioner about this issue, whether you were affected or not, as we commit to do this under our service level agreement with Licence holders.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or the support team if you require any further details.

Best Wishes

Mike Douglas

Director: Neighbourhood Alert Project

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