

One System, Two Uses: Intrado Cell Broadcast Service

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The following is contributed blog by Tim Auen, director of product management for [Intrado \[1\]](#).

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when it happened, but at some point in 2013, cell phones began to outnumber people in the United States. Sometime late this year, the number of mobile devices around the world is projected to surpass global population. Given this trend, the CTIA, FCC and FEMA initiated a joint effort to develop Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), a wireless version of emergency notification services. The valuable service was developed to increase public safety by capitalizing on this ubiquitous mode of modern communication. While wireless service providers carry no legal responsibility for participating in the program, they may face significant business implications for opting out. As more and more WEA messages are broadcasted around the country, customer retention could become a challenge for carriers that choose not to offer the service. For tier 1 carriers, WEA participation is an easy decision. Smaller carriers, however, may be challenged by the cost of required technology upgrades. Intrado Cell Broadcast Service (ICBS) allows tier 2 and tier 3 carriers to deliver lifesaving WEA messaging without expensive technology upgrades and provides a way to monetize their existing networks through the use of commercial cell broadcast messages.

Wireless Emergency Alerts

As with any new technology service, WEA comes with significant technology requirements. The service is dependent upon specific gateways that allow the emergency alerts to be disseminated by authorities to the wireless service providers and, ultimately, end-users. Within the WEA architecture, carriers are responsible for developing, testing and deploying the Commercial Mobile Service Provider (CMSP) Alert Gateway and Cell Broadcast Center (CBC) based upon standards adopted and provided by the WEA commission. As soon as a carrier communicates to the FCC their intent to participate in WEA, they must also attest to supporting and performing various functions at their gateway relative to connectivity, authentication and validation, security, geographic targeting and message management. For most tier 2 and 3 carriers, these requirements make participation in this service technologically and economically challenging. This is unfortunate because WEA messages have played a significant role in many recent emergency events, including the Colorado floods, a Connecticut tornado and a child abduction in Minneapolis. In each of these instances, cell phone users received specific unsolicited emergency information that provided warnings, instructions and descriptions that directly saved the lives of countless people. Clearly, this is an important service that every wireless carrier should consider offering to their customers.

Intrado Cell Broadcast Service (ICBS) was developed to make it easy and affordable for carriers of any size to broadcast important WEA messages. ICBS is a fully managed and hosted solution that enables wireless carriers to receive WEA emergency alerts aggregated and distributed by the Federal Alert Gateways while meeting all of the requirements of the FCC Warning, Alert and Response Network (WARN) Act. Emergency alerts are delivered over the Intrado network to a carrier's cell sites located within a targeted geographic alert area. The carrier's towers then broadcast the alerts to all WEA-enabled mobile handset that are being served by that tower at the time of the alert. With ICBS, carriers do not have to make significant network investments and are not responsible for any architecture testing or security. In this way, small regional carriers can provide their customers with the same emergency services offered by tier 1 carriers across the country.

Commercial Cell Broadcast Messages

In addition to the ability to deliver lifesaving WEA messages, ICBS allows carriers to monetize their network and drive revenue through the delivery of commercial cell broadcast messages. Using the same system designated for WEA messages, ICBS applies precision location technology to deliver a wide range of non-emergency messages to a geo-targeted audience. This is an exciting opportunity because it has broad applications that will allow carriers to recoup some of the cost of the WEA service.

ICBS for commercial purposes is an easy-to-use, fully hosted solution. The carrier simply provides Intrado with the content details and the geographic dimension—which cell towers to utilize. Intrado then audits the content for accuracy and sends out the messages over the carrier's network based on the specifications governing the distribution of the content—when, where and who receives it.

The most obvious application for commercial ICBS is location-based mobile marketing—one of the hottest new trends in retail sales. In this scenario, wireless subscribers opt into the service as a way of receiving coupons, product information, sale notifications, etc. Carriers then charge content providers (such as a retailer or a restaurant) a set fee per message sent out to customers based on their geo-targeted location.

Beyond retail applications, this can be a valuable asset to small communities that want an easy way to disseminate local notifications or news items. School districts can use the service to announce school closings. The carrier itself can even utilize the solution to announce product updates or other information directed to its customers.

Connecting with Customers

As the world becomes more and more wirelessly connected, the role of mobile devices is expanding rapidly. We no longer think of a cell phone as a simple way to make a call. Today, it is a dynamic tool to send, receive and interact with relevant information. The Intrado Cell Broadcast Service allows wireless carriers of all sizes

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to take advantage of this shift in the marketplace. This important service provides carriers with an easy and affordable way to deliver both emergency and commercial messages to their customers without the need for costly network investments.

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