

Best Practices for Outage Communications

Streamline Incident Communication With Intelligent Alerting

INTRODUCTION

Streamline communication with incident response teams, stakeholders and customers.

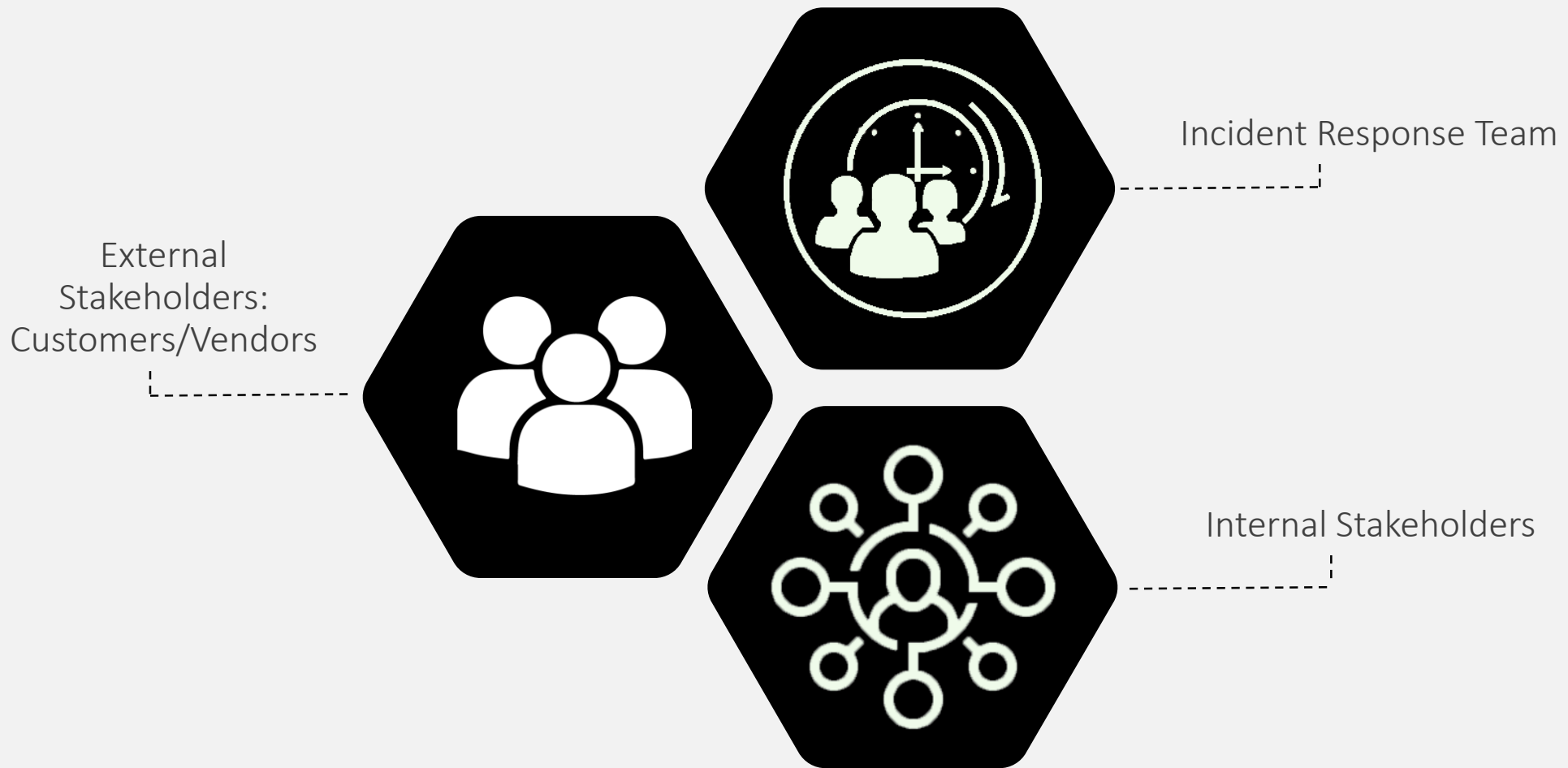
When incidents occur, you need a streamlined method for the rapid dissemination of information to relevant teams. What may seem to be an easy communication workflow solution, is in fact, just the tip of the iceberg of a major communication challenge.

Think about all the channels you can communicate on. Think about the various teams that need to be looped into the conversation, and different pieces of information that they may need. Think about how would you keep an audit of every action being taken, or each recipient's response time. Consider how would you keep your internal stakeholders informed, and how would you send out only relevant information to vendors or customers.

To enable organizations to build a robust outage communication workflow, OnPage highly suggests that firms deploy a comprehensive incident alerting solution, covering all sides of their communication needs.



To set the stage, there are three parties you need to communicate with during an outage. And each of these groups require different pieces of information to make sense of the situation. In this guide, we will walk you through best practices to communicate with the incident response team, employees and stakeholders, such as customers and vendors.



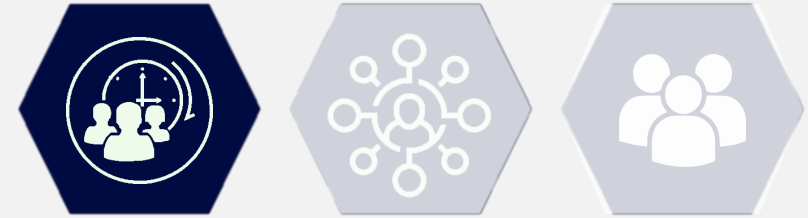


Incident Response Team

Have a well-orchestrated response workflow for those on the front-line of an incident.

Incident Response Team

The first step to incident resolution begins with preparation and assigning the **incident response team** to manage the issue. It is important that your front-line team and subject-matter experts are empowered with technology that enables them to have an **orchestrated response** to an incident. Successful incident resolution, when done correctly, will prevent an organization from massive revenue losses.



To ensure a successful remediation of an incident, you'll need to follow a three-prong approach, **1)** get the right manpower involved, **2)** pick the right communication channel and **3)** have an audit documentation available for post-mortem reporting.

Involve the Right People

The first step of incident resolution begins with assigning an incident commander, who takes ownership of the incident and makes final decisions. They are involved in defining incident teams, roles, procedures, escalations and failover policies. They take ownership of the situation from start-to-finish and are the point of contact for all teams involved.

OnPage's Incident alert management platform enhances an incident commander's operations. The platform can be used to create on-call schedules for team members, assign escalation rules and policies, store team members' preferred contact methods and enable redundancies to ensure no messages are missed.

OnPage makes it easy for the incident commander to bring teams of people together on one single platform to start resolving the issue at hand.

To take the guesswork out of the equation, the incident response team is notified as soon as there is an outage. Teams will also have rotations or "turns" if the first on-call member is not available. IT outage alerting can take place on multiple channels such as SMS, email, phone call and the OnPage mobile application. The underlying goal is to have a primary and secondary forms of alerting to ensure that responders get out of their beds even at 3 a.m. if need be.

Incident Response Team

Choose Your Communication Channels

Once the IT team is alerted of the situation, it needs an incident response tool, allowing them to exchange vital information and contextual data. In a high-stake situation, emails and SMS are not effective. They are indistinguishable from other notifications and are often missed. More importantly, these tools do not encourage collaboration, which is exactly what the team needs for successful outcomes.

Teams need a solution that allows for real-time chat for effective collaboration and speedy recovery. Indeed, the success of incident resolution rests on speed and accuracy, and chat plays a crucial role in rapid incident resolution.

OnPage also integrates with standard apps like [Slack](#), ensuring that messaging continues via a separate, high-priority channel.

Post-Mortem Reporting

For incident commanders to ensure further success, the actions taken by their response teams need to be documented and measured. This type of visibility can only occur when there is effective reporting attached to the critical alerting platform.



The [reporting tool](#) should provide summaries and insights through data. This information should highlight a team's effectiveness across multiple shifts and time zones. Thus, team leaders can see trends, performance, productivity and understand how well their team is doing.



With OnPage, you can directly **integrate** with a chat client for incidents, saving critical time and confusion, and cutting down on **resolution time**.



Internal Stakeholders

Selective information dissemination to internal stakeholders.

Internal Stakeholders

An incident commander often takes sole ownership of an outage situation. When they're in the middle of incident resolution, the last thing they want is for people to persistently approach for situational updates. That said, one can't emphasize enough how outages directly affect internal stakeholders. Leaving stakeholders in the dark is not recommended, since these representatives are answerable to their customers.

As a firm, you need to equip the incident manager with a tool that lets them send important information about the incident. Internal stakeholders are not interested in every minuscule detail. Information should be limited to the **severity of the situation**, estimated **resolution time** and any follow-up procedure to mitigate risks.

In gist, be proactive to send situational reports (sitreps) every time there is an update. You can also have an internal, real-time dashboard, displaying information including, the total open incidents, their severity, total resolved incidents, and the on-call tech support available.



An effective way to send these updates is through OnPage's incident alerting platform. You can create various groups using the platform's internal directory and send out updates that may be the most relevant to that group. For instance, the group tagged as "senior management," may be interested in only getting a view of the situation, while the folks in the customer support department need more insight into the situation to get the message out to anxious customers.

The second method, and a highly recommended solution, is to use a [mass notification](#) solution to get the word out. Like a two-way dispatcher, one has the option to pre-configure groups based on departments, seniority or any other criteria to send out notifications.

In either case, you will receive a time-stamped audit report of message statuses.



Customers

Be transparent with your customers and keep them apprised of the situation.

Customers



Finally, IT outage communication does not stop only at internal stakeholders; it is also an ideal practice to keep customers and vendors in the loop, especially if their operations are directly impacted by the outage.

Outages can be chaotic, and the last thing you want is to make logistical decisions as to how customers are informed. Leading organizations are increasingly becoming more and more transparent and keeping their customers aware of outages. They proactively post updates about an outage on their website as well as on their social media pages.

Another recent trend that we've been seeing is that some of our clients are interested in solutions, that enable them to proactively [mass notify](#) their customers during IT outages.

A good practice, when it comes to sending out mass notifications, is to have the right amount of information that is relevant to the customer. This may include a sanitized summary of the outage, the severity and the impact of the situation, and possibly, a temporary work-around if there is one. You may also choose to link a live dashboard with updates.

On the onset, it may seem that you are subjecting the firm into a vulnerable position by openly discussing failures, but on hindsight, people will perceive your firm to be far more ethical and responsible. What may seem to be a signal of weakness to prospective customers, would in fact, be perceived as signal of strength and ownership. Being transparent only solidifies trust in the minds of customers and fosters a better relationship with them. Hence, it is great business move to share timely updates to put them at ease.

Takeaways

- ✓ Plan ahead-of-time for outages to avoid further complications
- ✓ An incident commander should be appointed as the single-point of contact
- ✓ Automate the communication process to avoid manual errors and for speedy resolution. Have a mechanism in place to automatically alert the right person at the right time
- ✓ Proactively communicate with your customers and keep them updated
- ✓ Inform your internal stakeholders on a timely basis
- ✓ To learn from an event, maintain summaries and data insights

About OnPage

OnPage's award-winning incident alert management system for IT, MSP and healthcare professionals provides the industry's only ALERT-UNTIL-READ capabilities, ensuring that critical messages are never missed. OnPage enables organizations to get the most out of their digital investments, so that sensors, monitoring systems and people have a reliable way to escalate urgent notifications to the right person immediately.

OnPage's escalation, redundancy and scheduling features makes the system infinitely more secure and reliable than emails, texts and phone calls. OnPage shrinks resolution time by automating the notification process, reducing human errors and prioritizing

critical messages to ensure fast response times.

Whether to minimize IT infrastructure downtime or to reduce the response time of healthcare providers in life and death situations, organizations trust OnPage for all their secure, HIPAA-compliant, critical notification needs.

For more information, visit: www.onpage.com or contact the company at sales@onpagecorp.com or at (781) 916-0040.

