



# Airport Overcomes Complex Communications in Their Unique Environment with Networked Crisis Communication

When Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) upgraded its facilities to an all-IP network, the airport authority saw the opportunity to implement an emergency mass notification system that could integrate all existing communication devices as well as deliver true interoperability with surrounding federal and local partners.

The airport's capital investment includes 700 Cisco IP phones and enough digital displays to serve the entire airport. With this infrastructure in place, RDU wanted a mass notification system that could integrate as many IP communication channels as possible, including digital displays, ticketing terminals and more. The use of Cisco IP phones provides an additional communication channel, which is especially important during emergencies when phone lines are disrupted.



**Industry** Airports

**Location** Raleigh, NC

**Products** AtHoc Connect

<http://www.rdu.com>

## A Complicated Notification System Delayed Response and Added Complexity

RDU had been relying on a pager infrastructure that was not integrated with other communication modes, including phones, public address (PA) systems and other alerting mechanisms. RDU had to manage them all separately. Travelers in noisy terminals and staff personnel working on the tarmac or baggage stations relied heavily on displays (i.e., FIDS and RIDS) to get necessary communication. Managers had to oversee the flow of information for all the separate communication components. It was chaotic when the operations center sent out an alert to the entire facility.

Another challenge was managing an accurate list of external contacts. RDU used pagers and phones to send alerts, but distribution was difficult. Emergency managers maintained a distribution list of RDU employees and contacts at external organizations, including federal and regional first responders, airlines, ground service crews, retailers, fuel suppliers, cargo companies, general aviation services and other personnel who worked in – but not for – the airport. Keeping the distribution list current was an ongoing burden that required countless hours to manage, and the results were never fully accurate.

Neal Fontana, AtHoc account relationship manager, says, “RDU had to ensure that their notifications were sent, and were reaching the intended audience. The pagers were associated with individual workers rather than job titles, so RDU spent countless hours validating if individuals were still employed by the associated organizations in the contact list, or if they still had the same roles. RDU had no way to track when individuals changed roles, so alerts were sent to incorrect agencies or to people who no longer had any involvement with first response.

Additionally, there was no simple way for RDU to communicate with external organizations that were working on-site or offsite, without going outside the system to separate dashboards and processes. Lacking interoperable communication, organizations worked on their own without situational awareness and coordination – a driver for President Obama to enact the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Interoperable Communications Act, requiring interoperable communications for all its departments.

### Snapshot: Raleigh-Durham International Airport Serving One of the World’s Most Prominent Research Regions

- 9.5 million passengers in 2014
- More than 40,000 takeoffs and landings each year
- 352 daily commercial flights
- 4,929 acres
- 3 runways
- 2 terminals
- 10 airlines
- Hundreds of on- and off-site vendors

## AtHoc Networked Crisis Communication Addresses Current Challenges, Offers Scalability for Future

Seeking to address these myriad communication issues, RDU approached AtHoc. When RDU experienced the simplicity, flexibility and scalability AtHoc offered, the choice was clear. They planned the implementation in two phases. The first phase focused on unifying communications, enabling RDU to send out mass notification to their contact list via smartphone, email, SMS and Cisco IP phones. With AtHoc, RDU operators can request acknowledgements from users, so there's no question whether an alert reaches its target. In addition, they can pull detailed reports showing who didn't reply to an alert – pinpointing the area of need and increasing response effectiveness.

Phase two further unifies the system to include digital displays as well as interoperable communication with other organizations of interest. Digital displays will extend the reach of RDU's unified communications, and AtHoc Connect will enable the airport to achieve extensive interoperability with regional first responders, local authorities and other organizations within its network. When this phase is complete, an RDU operator will only need to log into one system to send a message to all targeted individuals and organizations across multiple devices.

AtHoc is trusted by 70% of the U.S. Department of Defense and federal government to secure hundreds of air facilities and military installations as well as distributed agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



**“Hence, that is why RDU purchased our integration capability to unify all the digital displays not only for their workers but also passengers in the terminals.”**

## **Full interoperable communication with all responding organizations, at the touch of a button**

With AtHoc Connect, RDU will have their own secure permission-based network to manage communications with other organizations in the community. The network will consist of four to eight staff members in every organization relevant to the airport's operations, including tenants, in-house first responders, regional first responders and local authorities.

RDU will no longer need to maintain a contact database that includes external personnel. Each organization will be responsible for updating its staff's contact numbers in its own system. RDU can simply choose the organizations it wishes to alert, and then, those organizations can distribute the message to their own staff according to their own protocols. "We'll know instantly who got the message, how they got it, and when they got it," says Emilio Angeli, Superintendent of Airport Communications.

With their own private crisis communication network, RDU can coordinate a collective response for any event – from flight delays to suspicious packages. Organizations from government authorities (e.g., TSA) to airport retailers (e.g., Starbucks and FedEx) can exchange trusted information during an event and have the awareness to make informed decisions.

## **Integrated and flexible**

AtHoc is helping RDU achieve maximum ROI on all its communication investments. Cisco IP phones and digital displays work together as a unified communication system to protect the people in, and around, the airport.

"The digital displays and Cisco IP phones are really important to us because we know that passengers and employees pay attention to them," notes Duane Legan, VP of Airport Operations. "We wanted the integration that AtHoc could deliver because that will let us manage all the displays from the same screen."

"We now have full control over how our messages are displayed plus have another redundant mode of communication just in case our phone lines go down," adds Duane. "We can now send a message to all Cisco IP phones and have the message displayed on the phones' LED screens; or the message can be sent as text and delivered as speech that can be broadcast over the phones, even if they were muted."

## **Simple to purchase, implement and manage**

Interoperability and integration were important factors in RDU's decision, but they also appreciated the comprehensive platform. "We didn't want to buy a lot of pieces from different vendors and try to integrate them," says Joan Dowdy, Program Manager of Information Services. "That would leave us right where we started, trying to manage a lot of separate systems. With AtHoc, there are no third-party components to integrate, so there are no additional budgets, procurement, or vendor management."

RDU also appreciated AtHoc's credibility. The AtHoc team was responsive and flexible during the airport's decision-making process. "They answered all our questions and helped us see how we could get the most out of AtHoc in our own environment – the best customer service and onboarding experience," says Joan.

## Connecting People, Organizations and Devices for Effective Crisis Communication

RDU no longer has to worry about complicated pager alerts. The Airport Authority can now use a single system to communicate and collaborate with their people and other organizations across many devices. With AtHoc, RDU can easily manage a variety of situations, from common scenarios like a blocked door to extreme incidents such as an active shooter. "Everyone understands the value of Networked Crisis Communication, but most people think it's just too

hard or too expensive to do well," says Neal. "But AtHoc addresses that in a really practical way. We gave RDU an easy tool to communicate to people and organizations, more reliably over more devices."

The Airport Authority feels strongly that every organization can benefit from joining AtHoc and the AtHoc Connect network.

### Find Out More

Using AtHoc, RDU is using networked crisis communication to create a connected airport – keeping its employees, stakeholders and community safe.

**For more information, visit:**

[www.RDU.com](http://www.RDU.com)

[www.AtHoc.com](http://www.AtHoc.com)

**Your organization deserves the leader in networked crisis communication.**

Go to [AtHoc.com](http://AtHoc.com) or call 650-685-3000

### About BlackBerry

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