



Concordia University Leverages Rave to Swiftly Respond to COVID-19 Outbreak

Rave and Concordia University partner for safety

When those in charge of student safety at Concordia University first chose Rave Mobile Safety and its critical communication and collaboration solution, they could have never predicted how they would eventually end up using the platform.

In fall 2019, Concordia University partnered with Rave to help improve communication across its two campuses in downtown Montreal. With a population of approximately 46,000 students and over 6,000 staff members, the university needed a way to broadly connect with their entire campus community as well as the ability to tailor and target messages to smaller, specific groups.



Customer
Concordia University

For example, if there was scheduled fire alarm testing in a particular on-campus dorm, Concordia would only need to inform students who lived in that dorm. Before implementing Rave, that message would have to be sent to everyone, regardless if they lived in that dorm or not.

“When we send people too many alerts that aren’t relevant to them, people lose interest and stop paying attention to our messages,” said the university’s emergency preparedness officer, Brigitte Boutet. “We try to only push out information that would impact the daily routine of staff and students.”

Additionally, Boutet was particularly attracted to how Rave’s platform could enhance two-way communication with students. Prior to implementing Rave, students could only alert campus safety by placing a voice call. With Rave, students are able to send more discrete text messages when they have a safety concern, such as reporting a suspicious person on campus.

Rave’s language translation capabilities were also a big draw. Concordia is an English university located in Quebec, a mostly French-speaking province. Because of this, all communication must be in both English and French. Bilingual communication is a way of life for Concordia University, so Boutet says she is excited to explore translation capabilities.

The coronavirus changes everything

Concordia was almost ready to officially roll out the Rave solution when the COVID-19 outbreak struck in March 2020. Despite this unexpected development, one of Concordia’s first uses of Rave occurred as many people were still adapting to the new reality. When a power outage at the university affected off-campus operations, a notification was swiftly sent to everyone it impacted, such as students attending online courses.

“The transition [to the Rave platform] was almost seamless. Most members of the community didn’t even realize that the notifications were sent from a new system.”

Brigitte Boutet, Emergency Preparedness Officer, Concordia University

Even though essential employees were the only people allowed on campus, Boutet found that Rave could be a powerful communication tool even when many of the university’s students and staff were scattered across the world. Boutet said the ability to send geo-targeted notifications will help reduce the amount of irrelevant alerts sent to people. In the event of an on-campus emergency, Boutet can send alerts only to people who are currently on campus, rather than sending it to Concordia’s whole community.

The university also provides a consolidated list of resources so students could quickly find how to receive care while Concordia campuses were closed. Students could also easily access wellness resources from the university and the Canadian government, or find other sources of assistance that are continually offered, such as the campus Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) or making a phone appointment with Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS).



"We provide lots of resources to students," Boutet said. "It was important that they could use those resources both on and off campus. We wanted to make sure they received reliable information like they would if they were on campus during a normal semester."

Flexibility for the future

Concordia University's fall 2020 semester will be delivered mostly online. Students will be able to access their usual courses that are available on-demand from anywhere in the world. The exception is when hands-on experience is necessary, such as lab or studio work. Even then, observing appropriate safety measures is key, with a modified schedule so that students can attend on a rolling basis with fewer participants than usual.

Since the start of the outbreak, Concordia's campus was restricted to employees who perform essential services, such as security personnel or technicians. In addition, authorized employees were allowed to work on campus to support labs, construction sites and other approved priorities. Starting with the fall semester, Concordia will allow back employees who perform other services on campus.

Even though the Concordia campus will be significantly quieter this fall, Boutet says that her team must consider and plan for the safety of those individuals.

"Fortunately we have a lot of distinction between what is our responsibility, and what falls to public health," said Boutet. "If there is a risk on campus for our community, we will alert our staff and students via Rave so they can take the proper precautions and safety measures."

Although the coronavirus outbreak has completely upended campus norms, Boutet says many of the same safety risks remain. Montreal is prone to severe weather events, and people on campus will still need to be notified if there are regional severe thunderstorm warnings, or if a winter blizzard threatens to close the campus.

Boutet and those responsible for the safety of students and staff will be using the capabilities by Rave Mobile Safety to prepare for the fall semester and beyond, ranging from everyday incidents and severe weather to rare occurrences, such as a worldwide pandemic.



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Brigitte Boutet
Emergency Preparedness Officer
Concordia University





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