



## AFTER SWINE FLU HYSTERIA: EIGHT KEYS FOR EFFECTIVE PANDEMIC COMMUNICATIONS

### Smart Companies Embracing Proactive Outbound Communications To Be Ready When Flu Returns

**SEATTLE—June 15, 2009** — Following the recent swine flu outbreak and resulting turmoil, many organizations are assessing whether they're fully prepared to handle such a widespread business disruption. Pandemic-proof communications are critical to understanding how the outbreak is impacting the workforce and what adjustments should be made to keep the business going. Two-way communication via multiple channels is by far the most effective way of reaching all stakeholders and giving employees the means to report on their status—both of which will help companies mitigate the financial and operational impact created by a prolonged outbreak.

[Varolii Corporation](#), one of the largest providers of automated communications nationwide, offers the following eight recommendations on how best to communicate during a pandemic:

1. **Be proactive, rather than reactive.** Proactive communication heads off rumors, panic and misinformation, so don't wait for employees to ask for information. Let them know you have a plan in place, what their options are for telecommuting, and what they can expect if an actual pandemic hits.
2. **Update employee contact information now.** If you can only reach employees through their work phone or email, you have a problem. During a pandemic, they may not have access to either one. Have your employees update all their contact information in your database, including personal mobile and home phone numbers, personal email accounts and other emergency contact information. Ideally, your communications system will automatically check for recent updates before sending out a critical message.
3. **Use multiple communication channels.** On any normal workday, many of your employees may be working remotely, traveling on business or on vacation. During a pandemic, up to 40 percent may be ill or quarantined away from home. You can't rely on just one communication channel. Use a combination of landline, mobile phone, text messaging and email, and make sure your employees know it's you calling. Otherwise, they may never pick up the phone or respond.
4. **Leverage two-way communication.** While outbound communication is critical, it's only half of the equation and doesn't give you enough information to keep your business running. Give employees multiple ways to keep you informed of their status. For example, are they coming to work? Are they taking care of loved ones or sick themselves? Two-way text messaging is especially effective for brief status updates or to tell employees they can retrieve a new companywide update online or via voice message at their convenience.
5. **Don't assume a single message will do the job.** If an employee doesn't answer, how do you know whether it's because they're too sick to answer or just briefly away from their phone? Sending a sequence of different messages across multiple channels that acknowledge previous communications can help. For example, consider sending a text message that references a previously unanswered phone call. Employees will then understand why additional messages were sent and what action to take.
6. **Communicate the way your employees want you to.** If you can track your employees' preferences and how they've responded to past communications, you'll not only be ahead of the game in getting their attention, you'll be able to tell if their current behavior is typical or an indication something may be wrong. For example, don't call a night-shift employee at 9 a.m. right when they're drifting off to sleep. Either call later in the day or send a silent text message.
7. **Don't forget your customers.** Just as it's important to communicate with your employees during a crisis, you should also keep your customers informed. Assuring them of how your business is continuing to operate will reduce confusion and let them know they can depend on you. If your communication system automatically checks for contact information updates in your customer relationship management (CRM) system and sends an automated message to customers, that's one step you won't have to manually undertake.
8. **Call in an expert.** If the first seven tips seem overwhelming, consider automating your critical communications, perhaps even outsourcing it to an automated communications provider. The most effective solution will:

Integrate with employee and customer databases in real time so your message gets through

Enable both inbound and outbound communication across multiple channels to share the most up-to-date information in both directions

Incorporate individual preferences and learn from past responses to ensure you get recipients' attention and can assess whether current behavior indicates something is wrong

Implement quickly and easily – well before a pandemic hits.

"Instead of being lulled into a false sense of security, companies should consider the recent swine flu outbreak to be a wakeup call," said Steve Zirkel, vice president and general manager of the Business Continuity division at Varolii. "While we're all fortunate it wasn't as severe as first thought, developing an effective communications strategy in advance is critical for when a more severe pandemic hits. Automated communications such as Varolii Pandemic Planning takes a lot of the time, cost and worry out of ensuring preparedness."

For more information, visit [Varolii Pandemic Planning](#).

#### About Varolii Corporation

Varolii is the market and technology leader in proactive outbound communications. Its on-demand communication software and services help organizations more effectively reach and interact with their customers and employees, getting the best result from every interaction. By automating the processes required for personalized communications such as flight cancellation notices, fraud detection alerts and prescription pick-up reminders, Varolii helps its clients reduce operational costs, increase contact center efficiency, and get more out of their existing IT investments. More than 380 companies, including many of the largest U.S. banks, airlines, wireless carriers, utilities, and healthcare organizations trust Varolii to send 4 million communications every business day. Varolii is headquartered in Seattle with offices in the Boston and Denver metropolitan areas. For more information, visit [www.varolii.com](http://www.varolii.com).

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