

North Park University improves campus security with MOTOTRBO™ radios



Campus security is always top of mind for university officials, but when the campus spreads throughout several blocks of a residential neighborhood, security becomes even more challenging. Ensuring safety for its students, faculty and staff, as well as peace of mind for parents, North Park University equipped its security staff with MOTOTRBO radios. From the athletic field to the recreation center and residential halls to the security escort service that transports students up to a mile off campus, North Park's security staff is connected and ready to respond.

Situation: Campus expansion and an aging radio system

Located on Chicago's north side, North Park University's 3,300 students come from around the world to live and study in an environment of diversity, faith, and values. Graduate and special undergraduate programs also bring adult working professionals to the campus in the evenings and on weekends. Founded more than a century ago, North Park's commitment to all of its students is to provide a safe place to learn today to help them meet the challenges of tomorrow.

In the past few years, the campus has grown to encompass over four square city blocks that wind through the surrounding neighborhood, dotted with multi-story buildings and mature trees. When Dan Gooris, director of campus security and former police chief of a northern Chicago suburb, first came to North Park in 2006, he found an antiquated two-way radio system nearing end-of-life and unable to meet the demands of the campus.

"Our student dispatchers had a hard time reaching our officers and often wouldn't receive a reply," he says. "We had no way of knowing if the officers had received the message. We couldn't tell if they were out of range, if the system wasn't working, or if there was interference from the terrain or the frequency we were using."

With the university beginning to purchase buildings that were not always adjacent to the main campus, the old radio system was pushed beyond its capabilities and Gooris knew it was time to upgrade.

"It's a good neighborhood but it's still an urban campus and it's near public transportation," says Gooris. "People get off the bus and some wander through the campus simply because of the beautiful landscape and peaceful environment."

Products

- MOTOTRBO XPR™ 6500 portable radios
- MOTOTRBO XPR™ 8300 repeater

Benefits

- Reliable communications between student dispatchers and campus security
- Enhanced coverage throughout the campus properties
- Increased security even for security shuttle drivers off campus
- Collaboration that provides virtual force enhancement



“I have to know that the officer working is getting the message when we call him. With our MOTOTRBO radios, we know the message is not getting lost. I wouldn’t think of using any other product.”

- Dan Gooris, Director of Campus Security, North Park University

Solution: Moving to digital two-way radio communications

Gooris reached out to a trusted local Motorola channel partner to discuss updating the university’s radio system. The channel partner recommended a MOTOTRBO digital two-way radio system for a number of reasons.

“It didn’t make sense for them to spend money to try and fix a system that would be obsolete in a few years,” says the channel partner. “Plus with the MOTOTRBO digital radios, they would only need one repeater to double the number of users on the same frequency. The audio would be much clearer and they would be able to extend coverage all the way out to the athletic field nearly a mile away.”

The digital portable radios would also provide greater communications reliability with technology that enhanced battery life, providing longer talk time through extended shifts.

North Park distributed MOTOTRBO portable radios to all members of its security staff, facilities personnel, and to critical locations on campus, including the library, residence halls, and resource centers. Radios provided to the residence halls sit in chargers on the front desk and operate like a base station controller, allowing the student front desk attendant on duty to quickly alert campus security in the event of an emergency.

The radios have the capability to transmit and receive private communications between individuals or direct communication to all locations simultaneously through group call, so that the information can be quickly passed to building occupants.

Results: Reliability and improved campus security

Because North Park is an open campus, situated close to public transportation and in the midst of a residential neighborhood, security becomes even more challenging. The ability for North Park University’s security staff to stay in touch or to quickly call for backup in the event of an emergency depends on reliable communications.

“I have to know that the officer on duty is getting the message when we call,” says Gooris. “With our MOTOTRBO radios, we know the message is not getting lost, even if the officer is off campus. I wouldn’t think of using any other product.”

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– Dan Gooris, Director of Campus Security, North Park University

Expanded coverage beyond the campus

The MOTOTRBO digital portable radios provide that reliability with enhanced coverage that enables clear communications throughout the campus and beyond. This reliability is especially important because North Park offers a campus safety escort service that extends out to a mile radius around the campus. The shuttle vehicles, operated by campus security officers equipped with MOTOTRBO radios, deliver or pick up students from the city’s public transportation, the athletic field, and other points in the area.

“We have a lot of students who work off-campus or need rides to and from public transportation centers,” says Gooris. “Last year we gave 575 shuttle rides, many between midnight and 4 a.m. Kids can call anytime from dusk to dawn and we can dispatch an officer knowing he or she will be able to communicate back to the campus as needed.”

Improved campus safety and security

North Park utilizes students as security dispatchers and residence hall front desk attendants. The MOTOTRBO radios provide a lifeline in case of emergency.

“At 3 a.m., the front desk attendants have a lonely job,” says Gooris. “If they see suspicious activity, MOTOTRBO radios have an emergency button that allows them to call security directly without having to go through the dispatcher, who might be on another call.”

No matter where they are within the coverage area, officers are able to radio back to confirm receipt of the dispatch and arrival on scene.

Collaboration facilitates ‘force enhancement’

One of Gooris’ priorities was to use the funds provided to gain the most value from the radios as possible. Providing the facilities and maintenance crews with radios enabled his security team to further enhance campus safety through collaboration.

“Whether it’s someone stuck in an elevator, a flood on campus, gaining access to a building, or having power turned on or off in one of the buildings, the ability to instantly communicate with our facility engineers or maintenance crews has been a big plus,” Gooris says. “In addition, they give us extra eyes and ears because they are always out there and can alert us in the event that something needs our attention.”



Motorola MOTOTRBO XPR Digital Radios



What's Next - Taking steps to further enhanced student safety

Sometimes when the students call to report an incident they will trivialize the event, which does not create a sense of urgency on the part of the dispatchers. In other cases students might even hold off making the call for a period of time, which creates the opportunity for a suspect to leave the scene. In both of these cases, the students often inform the parents later that even though they reported the incident, the security staff did not react in an appropriate time frame.

In order to provide proof of accountability, Gooris plans to add a data application to the MOTOTRBO system. The application will allow him to document each call that comes in with information such as time of call, what the caller reported, action taken by dispatch and security staff, and call close-out. Gooris also plans to use the documentation to train the dispatchers to probe for more information about the incident to determine the actual level of emergency as well as to provide security officers with situational awareness.

The application will provide proof that the student dispatchers handled the call appropriately, security officers arrived on scene within a reasonable amount of time, and that the call was handled properly from beginning to end.

"Universities are in the people business and we have to sell the safety of our campus," says Gooris. "MOTOTRBO provides reliable communications that help us keep our campus safe."



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