

## Instant Team Communication With PIER

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Management is mostly about knowing what is going on and making resource allocation decisions based on that knowledge. That is true of emergency and crisis management and it is true of day-to-day team and organizational management.

In the classic book "The Art of War," written in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by Sun Tzu, the Chinese military leader put intelligence gathering at the forefront of military tactics. The more critical the decisions, the more impact they have on people's lives, health and safety, the more important it is to base those decisions on the best information possible.

This short document demonstrates how you can use PIER to gather and share information. But first, let's discuss why this is so important.

### Why information sharing is so important

#### *Improved decision making*

Knowledge of what is happening right now within your organization and outside activities impacting your organization is absolutely essential to making effective management decisions. Sending fire trucks to a fire that turns out to be a rumor is a big mistake, but when those fire trucks are not available for a real fire, the mistake can turn fatal. Management decisions depend on best available information at the time; and that means that the best way to ensure the right decisions are made is to make certain those needing vital information have full and speedy access to it.

#### *Effective teamwork*

How much effort is duplicated in your organization because one part doesn't know what the other is doing? How many times have you heard or said, or said it yourself, that if only we had known earlier that big mistake wouldn't have been made. But there is another side to teamwork that is also lost due to inadequate or slow information flow: energy. The knowledge of progress made, of new deals closed, of major achievement of goals, of surprising new product development efforts—all these can be tremendous encouragements to others on the team. Effective information management builds cohesiveness, enthusiasm and motivation at all levels within your organization.

#### *Efficiency*

Military analysts and management gurus have long recognized that the key to effectiveness is initiative at the lowest levels. Squad level initiative – combined with commitment to their teammates – in the U.S. Army during World War II is credited as the major factor in the Army's success against the enemy. But the key to this initiative is information. With open, accurate and timely information flow, leaders throughout the organization can make confident decisions and take decisive action without delay.

### PIER and Instant Information

As a communication management platform, PIER is focused on getting the right information to the right people right now. That means getting information releases to the media, key stakeholders, internal audiences and more. But the starting point for a public information release is knowing

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what is actually going on. That's why the communication cycle starts early with information gathering. PIER can facilitate the process of collecting information and sharing that information with those people who need to know. When PIER is used for that, it becomes part of the decision-making process as well as the communication distribution process.

### PIER Methods for Information Sharing

#### *Internal Status Reports*

PIER sites that have been set up as part of a crisis communication process typically use a Document Type called "Internal Status Report." This is a secured document which means that it can never be sent to the public via the website, email or through other distributions. It can only be viewed by PIER users with the appropriate access.

In a Joint Information Center (JIC) operation, a member is positioned with the Planning Section to gather raw information about the event as it unfolds. All this information is captured in draft form on the Internal Status Report document. As new information is added, the staff person hits the "Submit" button which makes that draft available to all authorized users and then continues to add new real time information on the next draft.

The impact of this is making it possible for team members regardless of where they are located to gain immediate information about what is going on in the event and the response. They could not be much better informed if they stood in the Emergency Operation Center themselves!

The Internal Status Report is in essence the 209 form of the Incident Command System. If you want your Internal Status Report set up in the 209 format, a PIER Service Representative would be happy to help you set up a template.

For those in crisis communications and who don't use or are not familiar with ICS and the JIC, the same process applies. If you have a major recall, a serious legal crisis, an environmental disaster, or severe service disruption, the key to responding appropriately is still information. The same Internal Status Report can be used to keep a dispersed executive team fully informed of what is happening.

#### *Inquiry Management*

PIER's Inquiry Management function is designed to facilitate interactive communication. As such it can be used by anyone in the field who has access to a public or private PIER website to submit information. This can be a great and very simple way of keeping people informed. The fact that inquiries submitted can be automatically directed to email addresses makes it even more convenient. Plus, the automatic distribution based on categories can be very helpful in distributing information to the relevant parties.

For example, let's say you were a campus security manager for a large university campus that was targeted for a massive animal rights protest. Things would likely be happening in multiple places at the same time and your responses would have to be determined by reports in the field. Staff people could help you and your staff be kept continually and instantly informed of what was going on by submitting quick situation reports through inquiry management. The reports could be divided by categories such as physical clash, injuries, property damage, media activity, etc. Those reports as they come in would not only immediately show up in the PIER inquiry center, but would be automatically sent by email (Blackberry® or iPhone) to the appropriate people in the field responsible for responding. A communications control person could be designated to review all the reports and prioritize and verify the information, entering all the appropriate reports on

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the Internal Status Report mentioned in the section above. Any and all members of the university leadership group could have instant visibility either by directly viewing the inquiry center or by viewing updates of the Internal Status Reports.

It is important to remember when thinking about the use of PIER as an “instant information tool” that wireless devices such as Blackberry® and web-enabled phones like iPhone are excellent devices to submit such entries. The observer simply needs to have access to the fully public or private PIER site and submit an inquiry. That means the campus security officer could deploy potentially hundreds of student volunteers to be the eyes and ears of the event and they would not need radios or even PIER secured access; all they need is a way of getting on the internet even through their phones.

### *Situation Updates Using Survey Tool*

Another way of using PIER for instant information updates is through the survey function. This is a powerful tool under-used by most PIER clients. At PIER, we are using it to keep our dispersed team members operating as a more cohesive unit. We have employees scattered throughout the country and we want them to know what is going on with the company. We have a PIER Team site accessible only to PIER employees. When something important and relevant is happening we create a simple document, distribute it via email and post it to Recent Updates on the Team site. We also use the simple notification tools of SMS text messaging and text-to-voice telephone messaging to send urgent messages—such as a major new contract signing.

Recently we have added an “Activity Update” function on the Team site and each team member is encouraged to submit activity updates if something is going on of interest or relevance to the entire team. As I was writing this document one of our service staff received a wonderful thank you email from an important client saying that he had accomplished in a very short period of time what two other vendors had failed to do with considerable effort. The competence and dedication shown was much appreciated by the client. The “Activity Update” form—a very short survey form—was used to distribute this good news to the entire team.

Since PIER enables distributions of survey forms by email, these short postings are not only available to all team members viewing survey responses, but they get an email automatically from PIER with the update. You might say, just send a group email. But an email is not automatically posted to a shared website, nor is the relevant data stored where it can be accessed anytime and used to assemble regular reports.

### *Integration with Emergency Management Software*

Organization leaders using emergency management software most likely understand that information gathering and sharing is a fundamental task of the management responsibilities and the technology employed. The major systems being used for emergency management are WebEOC, E-Team, IAP, and MissionMode. PIER Systems is currently working with several of these providers to integrate the information gathering function of those systems into PIER. Efficiency is a primary driver of our thinking and that means not having to duplicate functions. If you are using a system that facilitates information sharing, talk to your Service Representative about the system you are using. Chances are we may already have an integration in place. If not, we will do all we can to make the systems talk to each other to eliminate any duplication of effort.



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## **Instant Team Communication With PIER**

### *Planning Your Information Gathering and Sharing Function*

We've talked here a bit about how PIER can be used in various ways to address the critical need for information gathering and sharing. Your circumstances and needs may be unique. That's why we encourage you to discuss your situation with us. We have an outstanding staff not only qualified in PIER, but many of whom are experts in communication strategy with years of experience in solving tough communication challenges. We encourage you to draw on this resource to help solve your communication challenges.

**For more information, go to [www.piersystems.com](http://www.piersystems.com)**