

Case Study: Office of Homeland Security- Georgia Emergency Management Association (OHS-GEMA) PIER at Core of Successful Public Affairs Management for G8 Summit Events

In 2004, the G8 Summit brought together the leaders of the world's major industrial nations and was held in Sea Island, Georgia. The event was categorized as a National Special Security Event, the highest level security event the Secret Service Coordinates. The Director of Public Affairs for Georgia's Emergency Management Association was tasked with coordinating all public affairs for the safety and security portion of the summit. PIER was selected to provide the vital communications center.



Overview

Customer Profile

OHS-GEMA is a branch within Georgia's Office of the Governor working under the Georgia Office of Homeland Security.

Business Situation

Coordination of public affairs for the safety and security of the leaders from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the UK, among others, participating in meetings being held in multiple locations.

Solution

OHS-GEMA had their PIER System launched within 2 days. The center was populated with content and contacts over a two week period. 120 unique users from federal and state agencies worked together for a successful summit.

Key Benefits

- Internal communications to keep all agencies informed
- Inquiry management allowing quick and consistent responses
- Control center security that allowed for different permission and access levels

Customer Profile

OHS-GEMA is a branch within Georgia's Office of the Governor working under the Georgia Office of Homeland Security. OHS-GEMA is the state organization responsible for providing the residents of Georgia with comprehensive emergency preparedness, and appropriate response and recovery programs in order to save lives, protect property and reduce the effects of disasters. The state of Georgia often experiences several weather related disasters a year, including localized floods and tornadoes.

The 2004 G8 Summit, which brought together the leaders of the world's major industrial nations, was held in Sea Island, Georgia on June 8-10th. With country leaders in attendance from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom among others, the event was categorized as a National Special Security Event, the highest level security event the Secret Service coordinates, and the highest level security event ever held in Georgia.

Business Situation

Lisa Ray, then Director of Public Affairs for OHS-GEMA, was tasked with coordinating all public affairs for the safety and security portion of the 2004 G8 Summit. Initially this task appeared as a daunting challenge.

The event itself was complex with meetings being held in several locations impacting the entire coast of Georgia and some inland locations as far as 100 miles apart. In addition, there were multiple state and federal organizations involved in geographically dispersed locations. All key personnel needed access to up-to-the-minute safety and security information. In addition, OHS-GEMA needed to attend to inquiries from the media, local elected officials and the general public.

*"A custom designed system
could not have met our needs
better."*

*- Lisa Ray, former Director of
Public Affairs, GEMA*

The Communications System

In February 2004, OHS-GEMA learned of the US Coast Guard District 7's successful use of the PIER System during the Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) event in Miami. Ray decided to license the PIER System for use during the G8 Summit.

OHS-GEMA had the PIER System launched within two days of the completed contract. Shortly thereafter, the two key users were adding content to the site. Specific G8 content was added by OHS-GEMA users over a two week period directly before the G8 Summit. Immediately before the Summit, OHS-GEMA users were familiar enough with PIER to provide their own Joint Information Center training to users from other participating federal and state agencies.

The web-based system allowed the over 120 unique users to access the system from wherever they happened to be located. New information was posted or distributed from the Unified Command Center and instantly all users had access. Although the event was set up as a classic Unified Command situation, the Joint Information Center (JIC) ended up being miles away from the Multiple Agency Command Center.

Key Benefits

PIER proved to be flexible enough to manage the evolving needs of the multiple agencies and multiple layers of management. Those at Unified Command used the internal communications tool in PIER to provide immediate updates to all users. Updates included information about bridge or road closures that impacted travel in, around or between the different Summit locations.

One of the most valuable features of PIER for the agencies during the Summit was the ability to manage inquiries. Members of the media or general public submitted email inquiries from the OHS-GEMA website. Users of PIER could read, respond and log information regarding the inquiry. At the end of the first day, they identified common inquiry topics and then developed consistent and approved responses. These responses were available to all users of the system. The reporting feature allowed agency managers to generate reports at any time about the history and scope of all inquiries during the event.

In addition, the Command Center was able to add and edit user permissions and access levels. These changes were completely transparent to the users. The system was also adjusted to allow users to be identified by their organization. Since there were so many people working together for the first time, what agency they represented was important information for understanding what perspective each was coming from.

For the OHS-GEMA Office of Public Affairs, the G8 Summit was a success. Everyone involved had access to the important information they needed, instantaneously. Inquiries from the media and public were answered quickly, accurately and consistently, and all organizations were able to get the big picture view of the public affairs activities through the various reporting features in PIER. By the second day of the Summit all the users were so accustomed to, and dependent on, the PIER System that whenever new information was being discussed, someone inevitably would ask, "Is it in PIER?"

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