Campus Safety Apps:
Student Engagement Matters

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Overview

In a previous guide, I wrote about the features, customizations and community awareness factors that are important to consider when looking for a campus safety app. I called this guide The Ultimate Guide to Campus Safety Apps. This guide served as both a jumping off point and an in-depth look at the entire working process of evaluating, selecting and maintaining safety apps in a campus environment.

In the community awareness section of this guide, several key sections outlined various ways that both your safety app vendor and your campus staff could work to increase student awareness of the app. Though I'm satisfied with this section and the guide as a whole, it came to my attention that most universities have a difficult time putting this into action. That is, successfully marketing their safety app solution to the very people it was purchased to protect. After all, **what good is a safety app when those it was meant to protect don't even know of its existence?**

Unfortunately, I see it far too often... colleges and universities (even very large and reputable ones) go through an exhaustive process of selecting a safety app, widdle down their vendor finalists, choose the final vendor, launch the app... then... (crickets). It becomes a dud, students have no connection to it or aren't even aware of it. They may know about it but didn't know what it does or why it should be on their phones.

Campus safety apps aren't meant to just be a symbol of safety, their relative ease-of-use and versatility should be prominently displayed and utilized to reduce crime and bolster campus security. It's not always easy for campus staff members to coordinate with one another or to even know how to raise awareness of the app in the first place. That's why I've decided to write this guide, to help you understand just how easy it can be (with the proper help) to get higher download and usage numbers from your campus safety app.

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Common usage issues

Safety app download numbers are a surface-level indicator of your student's interest in the app. Download numbers can be higher when initial awareness efforts are successful or if the app is white labelled (contains your school's branding). These 2 factors are vital for launching your app, but are not the end of the journey.
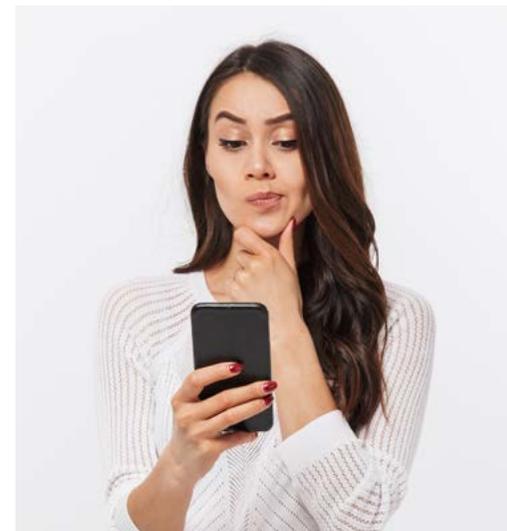
Even if a safety app has a high download rate, usage statistics often disappoint. This can be from a number of different factors:

Lack of marketing follow through

Despite best efforts, it can be easy to forget that the most successful marketing techniques come with consistent exposure. So even after a relatively ambitious launch campaign, enthusiasm (and numbers) will inevitably trickle down without follow through. In the next couple sections of this guide we'll go through specifically how you can combat this on your campus.

Confusion about the app

Perhaps the most common detriment to safety app success is miscommunication. This could be a misunderstanding about the app's features or how it works. Maybe key staff members are clueless or weren't informed about the app... or maybe they just don't have the confidence to act and use their platform to inform students. Either way, confusion leads to hesitation... and especially when staff members are already busy with their own workloads, it doesn't bode well for safety app

Subpar software

This isn't an easy pill to swallow, but some safety apps out there just aren't as good as advertised. I see it all the time. Some companies use front-loaded marketing and sales techniques to convince universities to buy their product and once they are locked in a contract... it's lights out. No communication, no help, and an underwhelming piece of software. It's hard to market that to your student body, especially when you're doing double work to create marketing materials and then distribute them all under a time crunch.

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Content matters

Before getting into the nitty gritty, let's highlight the importance of the content you'll be putting out there, and how some of it can payoff without a ton of effort.

Timing

A great deal of pain and anguish can be lifted off your back if you simply time your reach out effectively. Particularly the one entry point per semester (or year) that will see the most new faces arrive at your campus. This time varies depending on region, type of college, etc., but you'll know when this is... generally the time when orientations take place in summer or early fall for freshmen.

> ◎ **PRO TIP**
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> Going back to downloads and usage numbers, timing is instrumental in getting things started on the right foot. If you can't get good interest during these key events in the beginning of your school year, you may be trying to play catch up for what seems like forever. So just be sure your rollout campaign (no matter how simple or extensive) is prepared before this time starts, and heightened when it takes place.

Launch vs. maintenance

Launch campaigns for your safety app can contain different messaging than campaigns throughout the rest of the year. It's not always necessary to change your message completely, but it can be helpful to be more concise during launch and more specific (providing use-cases for certain events) when raising awareness at other times. For instance, the following snippet from an email blast may be more beneficial halfway through the semester than during launch (notice the specificity):

"...Don't forget to use the CampusShield safety app this weekend so you can easily alert stadium security if you see any sketchy behavior. Get CampusShield on the App Store or Google Play if you don't already have it on your phone!..."

This simple, two sentence message can work wonders in tying the safety app to a popular event like your football game and is sure to get attention for your app.

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You're busy... and that matters

It's not very likely that any staff member on campus is without something to do. It's another reason that safety app promotion doesn't take place. **This is why it's so critical that the process of promotion is clear and simple** to those responsible for the workload. This can also be helped by the safety app vendor and the materials they provide.

In the following sections, we'll break down the promotional practices that we've seen have a larger payoff for less work vs. those that go above and beyond. In reality, all of the following solutions can be simply implemented and have big payoff when it comes to student engagement, these categories help identify the practices that we've seen be

Easy promotion, large payoff

The following practices are proven to work... and work well. For the most part they're easy to implement and track direct success from. They also tend to encourage download rates at first, and continued usage over time if certain methods are consistently implemented (email blasts, looping videos on devices throughout campus, etc.).

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App integration code

This method is perhaps the **easiest and most effective way of increasing downloads if you happen to have an existing app that is used by many students** (for class schedules / news / events). The end result will be the safety app icon and name showing up within your existing app. It's like building your store in the middle of the busiest street in town. The traffic your app gets will naturally funnel students to the safety app and download will very likely see increased numbers.

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To get this implemented, your safety app vendor should be able to provide you with a snippet of code that can be forwarded to your IT department for integration.

Orientation presentation

This is the time when you have the most eyes and ears. This is your kick-off ceremony for your safety app. If you're security personnel, you might have the opportunity to speak or give a short presentation. It's the perfect time to give a concise mention of the safety app and why it's important. If this time is used properly, you should be able to see at least a 50% download rate from incoming freshmen.

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Most safety app vendors should either provide you with the presentation itself, a template, or give you guidance on the content. This way you don't have to sit down and create it from scratch (about an app you might still be learning to use).

Email blasts

This method can be incredibly effective when deployed with the right timing and message. Similar to the orientation presentation, the first e-blast will start things off on the right foot with your newer students when they're willing to pay the most attention. The great thing about an e-blast is the low effort / high reach potential, even with your non-freshmen.

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And of course one e-blast will be far less effective than several throughout the semester. **Studies show that about 6 e-blasts per year are ideal** (one every other month) in this context. Generating the email content for all six shouldn't be too time consuming and the effects can be very positive for raising awareness of your safety app.

Here's a quick example of an e-blast you can send to your student body to get them interested in downloading the app:

"…Did you know there's a way for you to easily and anonymously report sketchy behavior to campus security? You can do this without talking to anyone or remembering phone numbers or email addresses. It's called the CampusShield safety app! Download it free on the App Store or Google Play!…"

Promotional videos (for CCTV)

There are many videos that can be effective in raising awareness of your safety app. Video marketing is very effective in grabbing and keeping attention (as long as the content is engaging and to the point). Your safety app vendor may be able to provide you with a short video if your app is not white labelled. This will make your job very easy as you can simply send the file or link to the staff members responsible for displaying video on CCTV and other platforms around campus.

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If your app is white labelled, or if your vendor does not supply a pre-made video, you can still request a template video file for your creative team which can cut down on the video editing time. If your vendor does not supply either of these resources, you'll have to create the video yourself. Some universities take this opportunity to create some really engaging and campus-specific videos that resonate with their community. However, this does involve more work. It may be a larger investment but the payoff is a re-usable video that grabs a lot of attention.

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Going above and beyond

These awareness practices are going to put your app on another level if implemented properly. The more that can be done, the better the result.

Social media

Similar to email blasts in effort, social media posts are perhaps a wider net to cast depending on your student engagement on various social platforms. If your campus has a social media manager, coordinate with them on how often posts should go out regarding the safety app, and provide them with written and visual materials for easy translation into a post (so they don't get stuck on content). Again, your app vendor should be able to help you out by providing written and visual materials.

Physical handouts

Perhaps more of a traditional marketing method, utilizing printed materials can still be extremely effective in promotion, especially on a campus where students are physically present in various spaces owned by the school.

Obviously cost is involved with printing, but **the idea of holding something, or seeing something physical that promotes the app can have a greater impact** than a single social media post or email, since those are so common and perhaps more easily forgotten. Here are some ideas for different types of printed materials:

- ▸ Flyers / postcards (great for events like orientation)
- ▸ Posters (for hanging in highly trafficked areas)
- ▸ Stickers (handout or stick around campus)
- ▸ Pens / lanyards / candy (various websites like www.4imprint.com let you mass print on items like these)

(Left) An example of a postcard design for the CampusShield safety app. This material is provided to the university client by the vendor and is part of a larger package that helps reduce the workload of university staff members. **Ask your vendor about packages like this before choosing a safety app**.

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Community businesses

Another highly effective tool to facilitate downloads and usage is to build relationships with local businesses and community members. **It's easy to envision a win-win scenario with popular businesses around campus** ("buy a sandwich, show your app and get a free soft drink"). In this scenario, the business wins because they get more food purchases and foot traffic, while giving away something of little value (the soft drink). You win because now people are talking about your app and many have downloaded it as well.

These types of efforts and promotions can lead to a windfall of downloads and usage. Ideally, the vendor you select has team members who build these relationships on your behalf.

Enlist help

Professors are going to hold the student's attention the most throughout the year, so it might be worthwhile to enlist the help of some of the professors or other staff members who are student magnets. This can be as simple as sending an email or having a short conversation with some follow up materials. It's important that this person is confident in the safety app or else they won't feel comfortable promoting it. Student government, RAs or other active student groups may also be a good target for message distribution.

About the Author

Chad Salahshour founded 911Cellular after a lifetime of dedicated service as a law enforcement officer which began over three decades ago. Chad entered law enforcement in response to the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which killed his neice along with 258 passengers and crew members. Since that day, Chad took an oath to protect and serve others which continues to this day as his company develops unprecedented lifesaving software solutions.

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