Summary

Very few radio stations today still have the committed, well-staffed news department of the past. They once called local dispatchers on a regular basis for breaking news, monitored police scanners around the clock, and checked in at local police and fire stations. Some had their own traffic crew, which is not possible for most radio station budgets. Breaking news is no longer broadcast as timely as it needs to be, and some traffic problems are missed completely.

Challenge:

Radio needs a standardized system to be implemented with local safety forces/dispatchers to better communicate safety problems, traffic-related issues and breaking news to an audience that still needs to know this information as soon as possible, for the greater good of all.

1) The name of your company / organization?

WELW Radio
Willoughby, Ohio

2) Explain your “challenge.” Be as descriptive as possible, providing relevant background or other information to help student competitors clearly understand the problem to be solved.

THE PROBLEM:

Very few radio stations today still have the committed, well-staffed news department of the past. They once called local dispatchers on a regular basis for breaking news, monitored police scanners around the clock, and checked in at local police and fire stations. Some had their own traffic crew, which now is not possible for most radio station budgets. Instead, national traffic networks gather information by automated cameras, and this information is sent to stations regionally for download through FTP sites. Breaking news is not broadcast as timely as it needs to be, and some traffic problems are missed completely.

Ironically, as we admit this reduction of efficiency, today’s technology is readily available to communicate more easily, effectively and quickly. Many safety officials routinely post information to websites and social media sites, bypassing radio stations with this information. But these venues do not effectively
reach the public like radio broadcasts have done for years and still can, and radio staffers still are too few to check these Internet posts to communicate breaking news. Stations trying to rely on their listeners to call in traffic tips are often subject to inaccurate or distorted information, or worse, pranksters.

THE OPPORTUNITY:
Radio needs a standardized system to be implemented with local safety officials/dischappers to better communicate safety problems, traffic-related issues and breaking news to an audience that still needs to know this information as soon as possible, for the greater good of all.

Students would want to meet with chiefs, communication specialists, dispatchers, etc. to determine how this information can be quickly and easily communicated to radio stations. One idea could be as simple as texting or emailing a code to one designated recipient reporting that emergency information is available if they call into or check a source. This recipient could be associated with one radio station or represent multiple stations in this community who all agree to work together. Or there may be other systems or procedures that would be easier for the safety forces to utilize and/or better for radio stations to work with.

Universal situation codes would need to be devised, such as
   a. Traffic accident – road closure or rerouting recommended
   b. Severe weather – road closure or rerouting recommended
   c. Intersection stop lights malfunction
   d. Water main break
   e. Chemical spill
   f. Explosion
   g. Major fire
   h. Crime scene, etc.

Perhaps there are also codes needed for other aspects, such as what can be disclosed immediately and what safety forces need to remain confidential, such as
   i. Fatalities – do not release identities pending notification
   j. Fatalities – do not release pending confirmation
   k. Alleged gunman – do not release pending confirmation, etc.

3) How would you know if a student entry has produced a good solution? That is, how would you measure the effectiveness of the solution (e.g. surveys, online audience metrics, etc.)?

Stations would find it efficient and cost-effective.
4) Are there additional criteria against which the proposed solution should be evaluated? (e.g. well-designed, attractive interface, usability, mobility, low-cost implementation, etc.?)

Students would want to talk to radio executives, police/fire chiefs, etc.

5) What resources are available to help inform and guide the student competitors (e.g. data sources, reports, articles, audience metrics, etc.)?

6) Please provide the name(s) and contact information of someone we may contact if we have questions about your “challenge.”

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Phone: 440-567-8316
Challenge #20

Come up with a standardized system for short-staffed radio stations, working with local law enforcement and emergency response officials and dispatchers, to immediately alert the public to safety problems, traffic-related issues or breaking news.

Written materials¹:

1. Cover page with title, number of the challenge addressed, list of contributors and contact information.
2. One page executive summary w. title – required (12-point type, may be single-spaced)
3. White paper
   a. Required: Title, problem restatement and proposed solution (What is your innovation?), maximum three pages
   b. Required: Measurable aims: how will you know if your solution works, maximum one page.
   c. Required: Project description, maximum of 10 pages total
      i. Required: Evidence to support your approach, including a good understanding of the typical relationships that already exist between radio news staffs and public safety officials.
      ii. Required: Necessary resources to implement your solution, keeping in mind that it must not incur large expenditures.
      iii. Required: Implementation plan
      iv. Required: Timeline for implementation.
   v. Optional: Technical approach/details/steps required for the seamless transfer of information from public safety officials to the radio station.
   vi. Optional: Testing/Pilot Plan. This would involve testing a prototype before implementing the plan for multiple radio stations.
   d. Required: Financial Information – no page limit
      i. Required: Proposed budget and budget justification
   e. Appendices – optional, no page limit. Note: judges are not required to read appendices.

Presentation Materials²:

1. Set of PowerPoint slides without voiceover – maximum 20 slides as a PowerPoint file OR

¹ All written materials in the white paper must be in a normal 12-point type, double-spaced, unless otherwise noted. Charts, tables, illustrations and embedded spreadsheets may be single-spaced. Final deliverables of the cover sheet, executive summary and white paper must be three, and only three, separate Word documents or PDF files.
² If the presentation materials are posted on a private website, complete instructions for accessing the site must be given.
2. Link to a viewable set of PowerPoint slides with voiceover – maximum 20 slides, 5 minutes **OR**
3. Link to viewable video presentation, maximum 5 minutes.

**NOTES:** A starting point is a thorough examination of how this type of information currently is obtained by radio stations. Also, it will help to have a solid understanding of applicable laws governing public information.