



**Bedfordshire**  
Fire and Rescue Service



# Understanding the Public to keep them safe in a digital world



Neighbourhood  
Alert



Community  
View



Twitter



Facebook



Rapport



Social  
Sense

# Understanding and Communicating with the Public to keep them safe in a digital world

As technology develops and the variety of platforms people use to communicate becomes increasingly diverse, it becomes equally important that Public Sector organisations are able to adapt their communications to ensure their important 'warn and inform' messages are reaching the right communities in the right way. From the older communities who only have a landline phone to the younger digitally savvy communities who don't own a home phone, the Public Sector has to get their important messages through in an effective way to those who need them most.

**Bedfordshire Fire Alert** has become an essential component of a comprehensive communications strategy that enables the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) to communicate to all sections of society. There are currently in the region of 22,000 members of the public signed up in Bedfordshire who can be contacted by Email, SMS, Text, Voice Message. There is integrated simple technology designed for Social Media ambassadors to forward the essential messages straight on to Facebook or Twitter groups, expanding the reach much further.

Taking it one step further, BFRS have pioneered the use of a bespoke segmentation that describes and helps to safeguard the very diverse population of Bedfordshire. This segmentation, underpinned by Mosaic data, enables the Service to **effectively target Safe and Well checks to the members of the Public who are at the highest risk of incident.**

**"This platform forms a part of our plan to engage with Bedfordshire residents from all age and gender backgrounds using the channels to which they are most receptive. With a partnership approach, our aim is to target our safe and well checks to ensure those people at highest risk get the most help and can be contacted via Bedfordshire Fire Alert on a continuing basis. It also enables us to identify potential recruits by selecting those in particular demographic groups, and to warn those living in particular parts of the county of potential risks specific to their locality."**

**Thomas Warner, Prevention Support Manager**



# Making Sense of Social Media in Bedfordshire

BFRS also recognise that social media is now one of the main platforms for people to communicate and engage. Given its huge reach and impact in the local community, many Fire and Rescue Services have embraced social media as a key vehicle for message delivery and localised engagement, and have incorporated it as a key part of their communications and engagement strategy.

While the proactive and positive use of social media has had significant benefits and opportunities within Public Sector organisations, it has equally presented considerable challenges in order to:

- Keep the public informed of incidents – traffic accidents, road closures, as they happen;
- Manage and monitor access for 44 users to corporate social media accounts in an affordable way;
- Provide a management audit trail and history for all posts from all users;
- Promote regular safety campaigns using social media to as many higher risk residents as possible.
- Easy and efficient user interface designed to manage multiple accounts with less time and resource

BFRS have recently rolled out a ground-breaking programme to create a Facebook page for each of the 14 Community Fire Stations they have across the county. The aim is to build communities around each station to help the public have a very local engagement with their local Firefighters, to localise safety messages and boost local recruitment. This ambitious project relies on devolving responsibility for social media messaging to fire crews who are not communications professionals. This seems to contain an element of inherent risk to the organisation's brand and reputation, but careful briefing and training of firefighters has led to considerable benefits in really engaging with those demographic groups that are more likely to use social media.

Social Sense has enabled the Corporate Communications department at Bedfordshire FRS to **manage risk effectively and holistically**. Central administrators can see what each station and each individual user is sending out to the public, the messages they are getting back, and if they are responding promptly by using the colour coding of messages, using a traffic light system.



# Organised Corporate Messaging

BFRS currently have 44 active users of the system sending several messages across a variety of platforms each week. This has made it essential to understand when messages are going out so the public do not get spammed with several potentially similar messages at the same time. To help combat this, BFRS use a social media platform called Social Sense to schedule messages.

The green dots represent planned messages for all users to enable them to better coordinate together.

**“Social Sense has provided us with an effective tool for rolling out the use of Facebook and Twitter to front line staff. We have found the system to be very intuitive and it allows me to easily see the actions of all of the 44 users we have on the system. This is useful as it ensures our staff are accountable for what they communicate and ensure they stay on message in line with our highly trusted brand.”**

**Thomas Warner, Prevention Support Manager**

## Prominent innovations in the pipeline include:

- Integration with Neighbourhood Alert has been achieved with a fuller integration is planned in the near future;
- Using an additional 'Origins' data field to filter incoming messages by nationality, so BFRS can understand if certain issues are of more concern to certain ethnic groups than others”

