

CHILD ALERTS; MOBILIZING THE MASSES WITH ZERO MARKETING BUDGET: AMBER ALERT EUROPE: A CROWDSOURCING CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In urgent cases of child abductions, every single second counts. American research shows that 75% of abducted children that were killed by their abductor, were killed within the first three hours after the abduction.

Thankfully, the number of people that could potentially be on the lookout out for the abducted child is enormous. However, the challenge is to reach those millions of people within minutes, draw their attention and make sure that they're looking out for the missing child.

AMBER Alert Europe: proven concept

The European AMBER Alert currently reaches almost 2 million people within 10 minutes, literally making use of all media: TV, radio, mobile phones, apps, social media, websites and citizens' PCs.

Originated in the Netherlands, where borders are always near, the 'cross-border' aspect of the system is essential, allowing to swiftly cross borders, such as was the case during the recent cross-border AMBER Alert for two abducted Dutch brothers. In this case, effective use was made of large screens on airports and train stations, social media and apps in Belgium and Germany, reaching hundreds of thousands additional persons in the areas near the Dutch border. Effectively, over 7 million people were reached in the Benelux region within 24 hours.

The same technology is currently also used to alert & involve citizens in case of disasters in the Dutch Rotterdam-Rijnmond area, a highly industrialized and densely populated area, home to 1.2 million citizens.

Zero marketing budget

But how do you build a child alert, backed up by millions of citizens, with zero marketing budget? Effective crowdsourcing is the key. Where traditional alert systems that use only text messages cost millions of euros and require huge marketing investments to persuade citizens to join, the AMBER Alert system turns the concept around: citizens have the power in their hands.

Created as a citizen initiative and maintained by citizens, the European AMBER Alert offers citizens the choice to decide themselves how to receive the alert, instead of blindly sending out a text message. In 2013, social media allows us to bypass these costly 'old media' obstacles and directly communicate with citizens, giving us greater flexibility and allowing for faster innovation. Multi-channel instead of single channel communication.

16 AMBER Alerts, many saved children's lives (success rate: 73%*), 2 million registrations and zero marketing budget should prove the point.