

e2Campus Insights—Opt In vs. Opt Out

One big topic of recent conversations between e2Campus and our many clients has been the benefits of an **Opt-In** versus an **Opt-Out** user signup process. There are many misconceptions and opinions about what Opt-Out and Opt-In systems are, but the bottom line is that students, faculty, and staff are required to make a choice regardless of the method for participation in the ENS.

Traditionally, administrators term an uploading model as Opt-Out, and end user managed account as Opt-In. Today we hear more about Opt-Out/upload as a way to force more students to participate. Excluding yourself from a self sign up model sounds easier than requiring a user to disable a pre-created account, however, there are advantages and disadvantages to both. There are solutions beyond a simple data upload or implementing an account creation form.

While e2Campus provides you with the tools you'll need for both an upload and self-sign up format, there are three basic choices you can make to populate end user information:

- Self-sign up through your school website or portal system (OPT-IN,)
- upload of existing emergency contact information and pre-account creation for your faculty, staff and students (OPT-OUT,)
- Or a custom solution with a mandatory, real-time submission of user information, after they authenticate into your systems with a traceable "opt-out" choice (Hybrid.)

Going Opt-Out with User Uploads

Why not just upload? This seems easy enough; just use the phone numbers we've already collected in our existing student information system. Uploading the information seems to be the fastest way, but what about the validity of that data? You can export the emergency contact info you have for the student, but do you know if it is actually their telephone number? A landline or a mobile phone? If it's a mobile, is mobile terminated messaging enabled or can they only receive in-network texts? Do they use a major carrier or are they with a reseller or pay as you go? All these factors can keep you from being able to send an SMS message in an emergency.

Contrary to popular opinion, we do support bulk uploads. If you choose to upload your user data to e2Campus rather than utilize our Opt-In signup tools you certainly may. However, you need to remember that any information that is uploaded is not put through our real-time validation, and you run the serious risk of "garbage" data in your system. With uploaded mobile data, you should reasonably expect approximately 10%-15% of phone numbers uploaded to fail to deliver SMS due to incorrect numbers, incompatible texting plans, or blocked SMS services. You will also need to be sure that you test that data extensively post-upload to weed out that bad information and garbage data. A good practice is to follow these tests with a plan to contact users who had failures to find out if their information is incorrect or there is some sort of technical issue that is causing them to not receive the message without your help. Not relaying this information back to the user can cause a false sense of inclusion. Your students may think they are safe and signed up, when in fact they may not be for any number of reasons.

Several institutions prefer to take a softer approach to Opt-out, and will upload only basic student data, such as Usernames and Passwords, so that the students will have an easier time logging in and updating their information. This is certainly an option, but it still relies on the your students logging in and completing the registration process manually. While this looks good on paper, putting the onus on the students to fill in that information at their convenience often leads to a large number of incomplete accounts in your system and is not considered a best practice. If you're going to upload users into the system, make sure that you have the data to back it up. You'll find that you can often get larger coverage by opt-out, but there is a bit more management that needs to be done by your administrators.

Using an Opt-In, Self Signup Method

Providing a webpage for self-signup allows a true opt-in from your users. They provide phone numbers and email addresses that they wish to be contact at and you use that information to contact them in the event of an emergency. At the end of the day, it's the



Why Go Opt-Out?

By uploading your users, you can often get a large number of students, staff and/or faculty into e2Campus without waiting for users to self-subscribe. This usually means more coverage from day one, but an Opt-Out system *does* require quite a bit more administration on your part.

In order to properly manage an Opt-Out system you will need to test your data regularly and follow-up on failures. You'll also need to regularly add and remove users to make sure that you data is current. Since these tasks must be done regularly, they can be more time consuming that it's worth.

Why Go Opt-In?

By allowing your users to self-register for your ENS you put the user management responsibilities in *their* hands, meaning less time managing user data. An Opt-In system also requires much less testing. The only real drawback to going Opt-In is that you will see lower subscriber levels to start, and you will need to spend some time with on-campus promotions to make your students aware that they can register for alerts.

As your system grows, these concerns become less of a factor, since students will simply re-signup or extend their account as a part of their normal school year.

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user who's responsible for maintaining that data, not your institution. We've found that often, users who did not opt-into a system by this method will not trust the system. We've found that many users will actually *delete* messages from unknown senders, believing the messages are "spam".

Quite simply, the main reason for an opt-in model is e2Campus' real-time validation. If you do not perform a validated Opt-In, you can leave yourself at greater risk of failure when an emergency message is sent. When uploading information, a student may think that they are safe and will be notified, when in fact they may not receive any notifications due to outdated or incorrect information. e2Campus' validated opt-in process is a *real-time* test of their cell phone. If they fail the validation, then they can troubleshoot on the spot to FIX the issue – before an emergency occurs. Validated Opt-In also lets your users know that *they* are responsible for maintaining that data, not you

Using e2Campus to create a Hybrid registration experience

As another option, e2Campus also offers tools, such as SmartCode and a user management API that allows integration of the user signup and log in tools into your school's website. These web forms can be pre-filled with data pulled from your school database. Pre-filling information, such as username and password, makes your signup process seamless and instills a sense of trust in the system for your users. Using this method also allows you to place the registration tools strategically to all but force your students to register or actively decide to decline registration before taking other actions on the site.

Several schools have made e2Campus registration a part of existing on-line processes, such as signing up for a school email address, applying for a student ID card, or even registering for classes. By introducing your ENS signup as a part of another required task, you guarantee that each student will be presented with the opportunity to signup at least once a year. If you take this process one step further and require that they either register, or choose to decline at that point, you also can be confident that every student has participated, even if they all haven't signed up.

100% Coverage... Is This Really the Goal?

The main objective, of course, is to contact as many students, faculty, and staff as possible in an emergency. The reality is that the fastest and most popular means to contact the student is by SMS/ text messaging. We know that over 95% of college students today own a cell phone and that is very likely they are using it right now. Even more importantly, in an optimal setting, e2Campus can deliver more than 15,000 SMS messages in under a minute. In an emergency, is there a faster way to reach students, faculty and staff who are on or off campus? The challenge is getting the students, faculty, and staff to provide valid cell phone information to populate your ENS data and effectively deliver the SMS message.

Regardless of the method of signup, the biggest concern here is not 100% ENS registration, but 100% *participation*. This means that in the best-case scenario every student is either in the system, or has made the decision to be excluded—and made you aware of this decision by more than just not creating an account. e2Campus has the tools to allow you to create this sort of a process, whether you upload user lists, implement a signup page using our SmartCode, or enable some sort of automatic user signup using our API or database tools.

Remember, in order to reach that magic 100% campus coverage number, you will need to look beyond SMS. Regardless of Opt-In or Opt-out, some of your campus community will simply be unreachable by text message or voice call. That's why it is a true best practice to expand your ENS coverage to alternate methods of contact such as the Internet, whether it's on your website or social media sites, physical devices such as desktop pop-ups or leveraging your existing digital signage or siren system, and tying in your campus email server using SEED or your existing Listserv functionality. By expanding your reach beyond SMS, you guarantee that from day one you have 100% coverage of your campus population by webpages, social media sites, rss readers, digital signage, outdoor warning systems, desktops and more.

e2Campus will support you at no additional cost no matter what method you choose. Regardless of your choice, the changes to strengthen your ENS will require little effort from your internal staff. The upload formatting, the webpage development, the on-campus promotions can all take very little time with the right resource contact on your end and our dedicated support team here.

We look forward to helping you reach your emergency communication goals!



Mobile Opt In

If easy of registration is your primary concern, a third option called "Mobile Opt-In" might be right for your campus. Mobile Opt-In, a standard feature in e2Campus, allows you to configure a keyword. Anyone who texts your keyword to 79516 is then registered for your e2Campus alerts.

This method allows the fastest, easiest registration path, but also collects the least information and is open to the most people. The system will only store the registrant's phone number.

Again, this method, like the traditional Opt-In vs Opt-Out methods, is a trade off. When implementing Mobile Opt-In, you're opting for easier registration over data collection. In the end, only you can determine what's the right fit for your campus community. e2Campus provides you with the flexible solutions to get the job done.



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