

# How This International School Takes a Proactive Approach to Managing Critical Events



Disaster can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time. It's not a comforting thought by any means. It's easy to witness an unfolding tragedy and think that could never happen here.

But it can, and it does. Unless an organization is willing to acknowledge this, it will be caught unprepared if and when a crisis does occur, unable to effectively protect its people and assets.

## Inclusion, Diversity, Technology

Founded in 1952 with the intent of serving the diplomatic community in Myanmar's largest city, the International School Yangon (ISY) is a not-for-profit educational institution which serves students aged PreK-12. ISY teaches students from countries all over the world. As of last year, the student population totaled approximately 800, and over 200 faculty and staff.

## The International School Yangon

**Industry:**

Education/Non-Profit

**Location:**

Yangon, Myanmar

**Product:**

BlackBerry® Alert

**Employees:**

~200

**Website:**

<https://isyedu.org/>



ISY is heavily focused on the use of technology to enrich student education. This has served the school well over the past year, which saw it transition almost entirely to virtual learning, starting in April 2020. The school had planned to reopen its campus for regular classes in February 2021. Then the coup occurred.

## A Country in Crisis

“International airports were locked down, there were no scheduled commercial flights, and improvised explosive devices were regularly being set off in the street,” says John Whalen, Director of Health, Safety and Security at ISY. “We also had an issue from April 1st until about mid-May where there was no mobile data – the government cut the feeds. We could get data on a fixed fiber connection, but otherwise everyone was cut off.”

Due to lockdowns from both COVID and the coup, ISY’s workforce was widely distributed, with many staff in areas of the city that were particularly dangerous. Whalen and his colleagues needed a way to keep in touch with faculty and key employees even if the Internet and mobile data were both down. While the school had safety protocols in place, communication primarily took place via a combination of phone trees, email, and messaging applications.

“We’d been looking for a critical event management solution for some time before the coup – even before COVID,” Whalen admits. “The two incidents simply moved up the timeline and demonstrated to us that we couldn’t delay any longer.”

## No More Waiting

Whalen and his colleagues explored multiple solutions, such as mesh networks that don’t rely on mobile data. The problem with each option, aside from cost, was that most relied on external equipment that was illegal to import. Eventually, the search led to BlackBerry’s critical event management platform, [BlackBerry® Alert](#) – also available to the public sector as [BlackBerry® AtHoc](#). A thirty-year veteran of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the United States military, Whalen was already familiar with BlackBerry’s reputation for quality and security.

“I have a lot of friends at the U.S. Embassy in Yangon, which currently operates a deployment of BlackBerry AtHoc,” Whalen recalls. “I remember I was out to lunch one day, the friend I was eating with had his phone on him and received a notification from AtHoc. After seeing it in action, I realized it could be a solution for the school – a replacement for the phone trees and group chats which would allow us to communicate out-of-band and without reliance on traditional channels.”

For Whalen, the two biggest draws of the solution were the Alerting and Personnel Accountability features.

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“It simply isn’t possible to assign a dollar value to something like BlackBerry Alert. You’re talking about people’s lives – that can’t be boiled down to a simple business decision.”

– John Whalen,  
Director of Health, Safety and Security,  
The International School Yangon

“BlackBerry Alert delivered exactly the functionality we required,” notes Whalen. “A mechanism for getting information to people quickly and knowing when they received it, and one that lets us know if anyone is in harm’s way. I especially like being able to pull someone up on the map and figure out where they are if they have an issue.”

## The Power of Preparation

Working with BlackBerry, ISY rolled out BlackBerry Alert in just under a week. The system was configured so that Whalen, the school’s director, and the school’s communications director can send alerts and initiate accountability exercises. Templates include campus lockdown and intruder drill notifications, notifications for political unrest, shelter in place notices, notifications for daily power outages, general information broadcasts, and re-broadcasts from the U.S. Embassy.

Currently, the solution is exclusive to faculty, key staff and security, with eventual plans to extend it to remaining personnel as well as, possibly, parents and students. To date, Whalen has sent 528 alerts and 25 accountability notifications, conducted in the interest of perfecting ISY’s deployment.

Beyond its current use case, ISY is also exploring the possibility of using BlackBerry Alert’s mobile functionality as part of a school bus and travel security program. This would also allow it to better support an initiative known as “A Week Without Walls,” which sees students travel to the countryside to host classes in an external setting. With these additional features, students can report events or observations from their location and share multimedia content (videos, photos, text) and geo-location data.

“If all our staff were in town, expats in particular, I could see us using BlackBerry Alert very extensively,” says Whalen. “For now, it’s enough to know we’re taking the right measures to keep our people safe. My goal is to have everything in place so that when our teachers return, the transition is seamless.”

For more information, visit [BlackBerry.com/Alert](https://BlackBerry.com/Alert) and follow [@BlackBerry](https://twitter.com/BlackBerry) on Twitter.

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“There’s still a lot of violence here; a lot of IEDs going off regularly, generally directed towards government facilities, officials, and so forth. There’s a high risk that someone will be in the wrong place at the wrong time. BlackBerry Alert’s accountability feature is important in those types of events especially, just to make sure everyone is okay.”

– John Whalen,  
Director of Health, Safety and Security,  
The International School Yangon

## About BlackBerry

BlackBerry (NYSE: BB; TSX: BB) provides intelligent security software and services to enterprises and governments around the world. The company secures more than 500M endpoints including 150M cars on the road today. Based in Waterloo, Ontario, the company leverages AI and machine learning to deliver innovative solutions in the areas of cybersecurity, safety and data privacy solutions, and is a leader in the areas of endpoint security management, encryption, and embedded systems. BlackBerry’s vision is clear — to secure a connected future you can trust.

For more information, visit [BlackBerry.com](https://BlackBerry.com) and follow [@BlackBerry](https://twitter.com/BlackBerry).

  
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