

# The Cost of Chaos

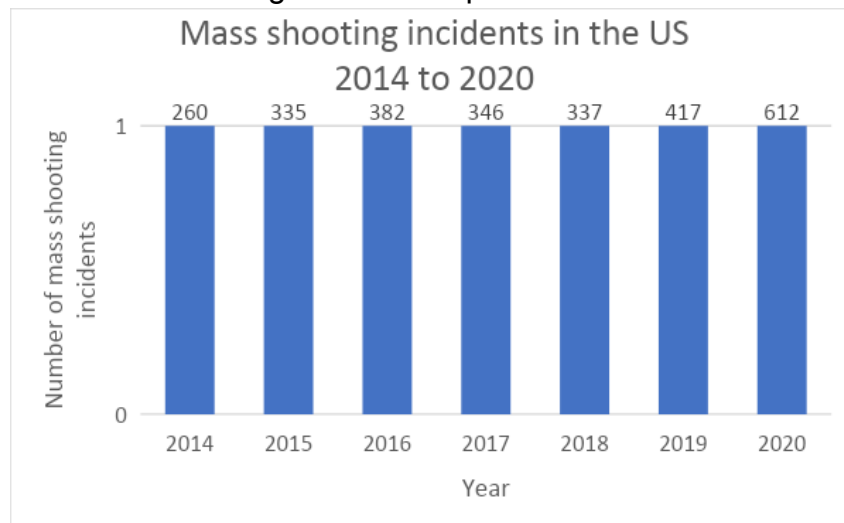
## Why Your Organization Should Have a Plan for Restoring Calm

### Introduction

You probably already know that during an active shooter crisis, seconds can make the difference between life and death. However, has your organization fully considered the impact of the seconds and minutes *after* an attack? Your facility may have panic buttons to rapidly summon police and mass notification systems to alert everyone on site, but if your crisis management plan does not take into account how to reduce chaos and rapidly restore calm after an event, you may face a drawn-out site closure, thousands of dollars in lost revenue, and traumatized staff and customers. What's more, all of this can happen *even if no shooting has actually happened*, due to the prevalence of false alarms. With the right technology, you can reduce false alarms and restore calm rapidly after a crisis.

### Mass Shootings are On the Rise—Are You Prepared?

Data from the Gun Violence Archive indicates that 2020 was the worst year on record for mass shootings<sup>1</sup> **with 610 incidents, compared to 417 in 2019.**<sup>2</sup> The increase may be partly due to mental health issues related to the coronavirus pandemic and its resultant economic and social crises. However, the fact remains that mass shootings in the United States are going up year after year. Any facility where people congregate—offices, schools, shopping malls, entertainment venues, churches, synagogues, government buildings—needs a system and a plan in place to respond to active shooter incidents and bring them to a rapid conclusion.



Data: Gun Violence Archive

However, surprisingly few are fully prepared. A 2016 survey of 888 organizations (focusing on companies with more than 500 employees) found that although 69 percent of organizations considered an active shooter situation to be a top threat, an astounding 79 percent did not

<sup>1</sup> Defined as a minimum of four victims shot, fatally or not (excluding the shooter himself).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

believe that their organizations were fully prepared for such an incident. Moreover, 39 percent had no communication plan in place, meaning that an active shooter incident could cause minutes, hours, days, or even weeks of chaos in addition to the loss of life.<sup>3</sup>

### **It's Not Over Until the Chaos Stops**

In an unfolding crisis, chaos is the enemy that prevents an effective response and prolongs an incident from seconds to minutes or even hours. In an active shooter situation, people panic, the chain of command breaks down, and it's not always clear to emergency responders where they are needed and how to address the situation.

Moreover, once a threat is detected, news of the incident spreads quickly as people inside send terrified texts to their loved ones. Soon, newspapers, TV stations, and other local media will get word, joining panicked family members outside the facility. Rumors spread, amplifying misinformation and potentially confusing first responders.

Unfortunately, the chaos doesn't stop when the shooting does. As long as panic, disarray, and conflicting information reign at the scene, the incident is not "over"—even the shooter has been apprehended and police, EMTs, and fire personnel are on site and doing their jobs. People don't know whether it's safe to return to the building or come out of hiding. The facility is now a crime scene, and police may need hours, days, or even weeks to conclude their investigation. Normal operations cannot resume, with dire consequences.

### **Fear and Trauma**

The longer terror and chaos continue after an active shooter incident—particularly if people are trapped inside a building that has yet to be declared safe by the police—the greater the risk that employees will be too traumatized to resume their jobs and that customers will be reluctant to return to a space they perceive as unsafe. Lengthy police investigations, which are the norm following a chaotic incident, also contribute to public perceptions that your site is dangerous.

Such perceptions can last for months after an incident. In the quarter following the 2017 Las Vegas music festival shooting, when the perpetrator fired from the Mandalay Bay hotel and casino, the hotel's revenue per available room dropped from \$194 to \$149 as customers remained reluctant to book.<sup>4</sup> A major convention cancelled its booking, as did many smaller events and individual customers. Six months after the shooting, shares in the company were down 8.6%, eliminating \$1.7 billion in market capitalization.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.everbridge.com/customers/success-center/resource/2016-active-shooter-preparedness-research-report/>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.reviewjournal.com/business/casinos-gaming/2-years-after-las-vegas-shooting-mandalay-bay-regainin-g-footing-1863781/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reviewjournal.com/business/casinos-gaming/las-vegas-shooting-still-hurting-mgm-resorts-business/>

It is probably inevitable that a shooting incident will damage public perception of your business, at least temporarily. However, the sooner the incident ends and normal operations resume, the less the damage will be. Technology that rapidly conveys necessary and accurate information to everyone on site, the police, and other first responders can help bring incidents to a faster, less chaotic, conclusion.

### **Business Continuity**

For businesses, every minute of closure translates into lost revenue. When customers cannot access your site and staff are unable to do their jobs, the dollar value of lost transactions can be staggering. Moreover, police investigations can last for days, or even weeks. During this time, your building—which is, after all, a crime scene—must remain closed. After the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, police closed the street where the club was located for nine days while they processed the scene. Surrounding businesses had to close, and even when they reopened, foot traffic was reduced. An employee at an electronics store a few doors down from Pulse estimated that the business lost \$4,000 to \$5,000 a month following the shooting.<sup>6</sup>

Keep in mind that business interruption insurance may not cover losses you incur while the facility is closed. If a business temporarily closes in the wake of an active shooter incident but the facility is not physically damaged, the insurance company may classify this as a business decision rather than a covered loss—and subsequently won't pay a dime. Organizations with general liability insurance sometimes find that their insurance companies will not pay unless an employee perpetrated the shooting or the organization is held legally liable for the event. Some liability policies flat-out refuse to cover gun violence at all.

The cost of chaos to businesses goes far beyond lost revenue and insurance woes. It can also include defense and indemnity costs related to victim lawsuits, the cost of repairing property damage, media consulting, and trauma counseling. A December 2019 article in *Risk Management* details some of the costs of several of the most widely known mass shooting incidents in recent years:<sup>7</sup>

- Route 91 Harvest Music Festival, Las Vegas (2017): \$735 to \$800 million to settle lawsuits against MGM Resorts, the owner of the hotel where the shooting originated
- Pulse nightclub, Orlando (2016): \$385 million, excluding the cost of mental health counseling
- Virginia Tech University (2007): \$48.2 million in litigation and recovery costs
- Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012): \$50 million in rebuilding costs
- Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (2017): \$1.2 million to replace carpet and tiles, get lost luggage back to its owners, and perform a crisis response assessment

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<https://www.marketplace.org/2017/06/12/some-businesses-bounce-back-others-struggle-one-year-after-pulse-nightclub/>

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[https://www.andersonkill.com//Custom/PublicationPDF/PublicationID\\_1806\\_Insurance-Considerations-for-Shooting-Incidents\\_Horkovich\\_Aviles.pdf](https://www.andersonkill.com//Custom/PublicationPDF/PublicationID_1806_Insurance-Considerations-for-Shooting-Incidents_Horkovich_Aviles.pdf)

As with public perception, some business continuity losses are unavoidable following a shooting. But what if your site employed technology that gave police and first responders updated, interactive floor plans, enabling them to rapidly clear the site, treat injuries, and focus on the right places for their investigations? People may suffer less trauma, your facility may incur less damage, and you can get back to business much sooner.

### **False Alarms**

The catastrophic consequences to public perception and business continuity described above can occur *even if no shooting has actually taken place*. False alarms can be just as damaging as actual incidents. Just like real shootings, they cause chaos, sow fear, and block normal operations. Moreover, they waste police, fire, and EMT resources; contribute to an insidious environment of anxiety at your site; and lead to “false alarm fatigue” that can inhibit the effectiveness of your response in a real crisis.

Examples of false alarms abound. In 2019, false alarms were triggered by a faulty water heater at a school in North Carolina, a motorcycle backfiring in New York City’s Times Square, and popping balloons at a mall in Florida, among many other mundane occurrences.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The Toll on Law Enforcement*

In August 2019, an employee at an office tower in suburban McLean, Virginia, called 911 to report an active shooter threat. Police responded within minutes, deploying 89 officers and other emergency personnel for three hours. However, it turned out to be a false alarm.<sup>9</sup> Within days of that incident, a falling sign at a mall in Utah made a loud noise that someone mistook for gunfire. A panicked crowd was evacuated from the mall, and 55 officers were deployed at an estimated cost of nearly \$5,000.<sup>10</sup>

It’s expensive to deploy officers for hours on end in response to a false alarm, and the true costs go far beyond dollar value. Frank Straub, director of mass violence response studies at the National Police Foundation and former police chief of Spokane, Washington, told *USA Today* that he was more concerned with what he calls the “hidden costs” of deploying officers—stress, anxiety, and trauma—than with the monetary impact of false alarms.<sup>11</sup> Responding to a life-or-death situation—even if it turns out to be a false alarm—takes a psychological toll on the police and emergency personnel who respond and saps the mental and financial resources they need to address a real emergency.

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<sup>8</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/false-alarms-real-fear-even-without-gunfire-active-shooter-alerts-creat-e-terror/2019/03/19/f7f66d78-4a55-11e9-b79a-961983b7e0cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/false-alarms-real-fear-even-without-gunfire-active-shooter-alerts-creat-e-terror/2019/03/19/f7f66d78-4a55-11e9-b79a-961983b7e0cd_story.html)

<sup>9</sup>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/08/13/mass-shooting-false-alarms-have-hidden-cost-police-community/1956610001/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### *The Toll on Individuals*

Ordinary people suffer from false alarms, too. On March 13, 2019, a mass alert system throughout the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus blared: "Active shooter in Mason Hall. Run, hide, fight." Terrified students, faculty, staff, and visitors fled, hid, and posted panicked messages on social media. However, it was a false alarm—the alert was triggered by popping balloons. The university's mass notification system would have been essential in a real crisis, but lacking the technology to distinguish between a false alarm and a real threat, it sowed chaos instead. A student later told the *Washington Post* that she no longer feels safe going to the library after hiding there from what she believed was an active shooter.<sup>12</sup>

False alarms can cause physical injuries as well as psychological damage. After a false alarm at a performance of *Hamilton* in San Francisco, three people were injured while fleeing and another had a heart attack. In a Florida incident where popping balloons were mistaken for shots, a stampede led to four people being taken to the hospital and 10 more being treated for injuries on site.<sup>13</sup>

For every real shooting, there are many more false alarms. False alarms trigger unnecessary mayhem, waste financial and psychological resources, and traumatize and potentially injure people on site. When selecting technology to address active shooter crises, choose a platform with sophisticated false alarm detection.

### **The GABRIEL System: Bringing Crises to Rapid Conclusion**

GABRIEL, a simple, easy-to-use crisis-response system developed by people who have experienced the chaos of terror attacks and active shooter situations firsthand, offers an example of the type of integrated technology that can reduce chaos and prevent false alarms.

#### *GABRIEL Ends Incidents Sooner—So You Can Get Back to Business*

GABRIEL utilizes technology that most people have on their person at all times—smartphones—to eliminate confusion and enable people on site to quickly and effectively take control of the situation. The three-part system—comprising a user-friendly app, smart sensor shields, and an intuitive command dashboard—provides instant situational awareness and communication for people on the ground, security staff, management, and first responders, saving essential time.

GABRIEL can integrate with existing technology at a facility, making it simple and cost-effective to implement. It provides **universal activation**—anyone, anywhere on site, can use the sensor or our app to sound the alarm—and **full-scale alert**. Everyone on the premises, as well as first responders, will be instantly notified via video, text, and alarms sounding throughout property.

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<sup>12</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/false-alarms-real-fear-even-without-gunfire-active-shooter-alerts-creat-e-terror/2019/03/19/f7f66d78-4a55-11e9-b79a-961983b7e0cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/false-alarms-real-fear-even-without-gunfire-active-shooter-alerts-creat-e-terror/2019/03/19/f7f66d78-4a55-11e9-b79a-961983b7e0cd_story.html)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Once a threat is identified, GABRIEL:

- Alerts on-site staff of danger and law enforcement of an emergency
- Provides situational awareness to management and security teams via an interactive floor plan that updates “hot zones” and “safe zones” in real time
- Creates two-way communication with all connected devices
- Empowers everyone involved with life-saving information and tools
- Directs responders to the real-time point of need inside the building

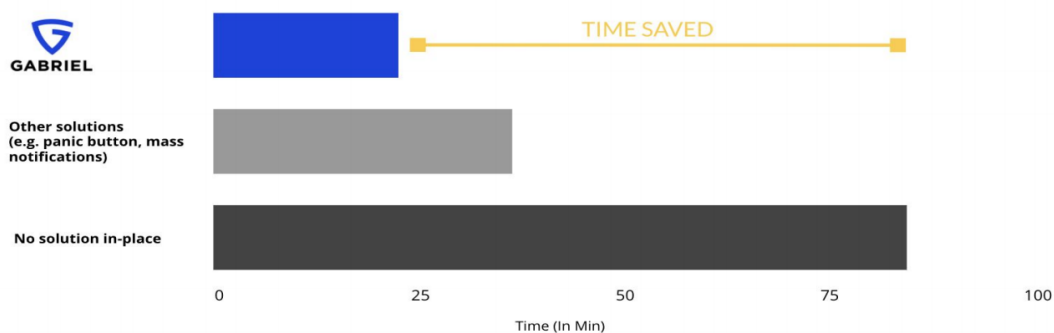
GABRIEL also includes post-event analyses with recordings so that users can learn from past events and improve their response. Moreover, it allows multiple sites in an area to share information and alerts in case a shooter moves to multiple locations.

### *GABRIEL Prevents False Alarms*

GABRIEL’s instant gunshot detection feature is always listening for trouble. It rapidly initiates an effective crisis response even if no one has pressed a panic button. However, it filters out noises that are harmless but loud—popping balloons, falling objects, backfiring motorcycles—to distinguish them from gunshots and explosions. The system has never automatically triggered an alert in response to a harmless noise.

Moreover, if someone on site accidentally or maliciously triggers a false alarm, the command dashboard allows key personnel to see exactly where the alarm was triggered and by whom, and to communicate with people near the incident. They can then disable the response and call off law enforcement, preventing a costly, chaotic, and traumatizing emergency situation.

**On average, facilities with GABRIEL can resolve a crisis situation an hour sooner than facilities with no solution in place, and up to 15 crucial minutes sooner than facilities with less comprehensive solutions—potentially saving dozens of lives, reducing trauma, and making it easier to get back to “business as usual.”**



Based on Gabriel analysis of real active shooter incidents

## **A Case Study**

The following case study, comparing two facilities in Michigan, illustrates the “cost of chaos” when responding to an active shooter threat:

At 1,500-person facility that was better prepared than most:



On a late December morning, an active shooter alert sounded throughout the facility. This site was better prepared than most after installing lockdown buttons throughout the school, a direct line to the local police department, and mass notification tools, including sirens and text-messaging tools. Students and staff scurried into classrooms. Those near exits fled the building, making their way to nearby strip malls and homes to take cover.



Police responded quickly and in force. Within three minutes, the first officer arrived and was followed by eight agencies providing additional cover, including the county sheriff's office, regional Homeland Security, SWOT, and helicopter support.



Two and a half hours later, SWOT finished clearing the building and declared it safe. The site remained on shelter-in-place for the remainder of the day. Students and staff were slow to return, and the drain on public safety resources was significant.

**Two weeks later the findings were released—a student had triggered one of the lockdown buttons, launching the false alarm.** This was a relatively happy ending, but the lack of tools to manage a real crisis was glaring.

**Had this been a true active shooter situation, responders would have been in the dark as they tried to find and engage the perpetrator.** It would have taken too long to treat the wounded, and everyone trapped on site would simply be sitting ducks until the situation was fully under control. **Moreover, it could have been hours—or even days—before normal operations could resume.**

A 1,500-person facility with GABRIEL:



Two days prior to the incident described above, a staff member was showing the GABRIEL app to a visitor, boasting about its capabilities, when he unintentionally held down the panic button. Within seconds, the entire building's shields were blaring sirens and flashing lights, all mobile phones were mimicking the alert, and the security team was in motion. Staff members throughout the building began asking (in the GABRIEL messaging platform) whether this was a drill or false alarm.



Immediately, the site's management and security staff received an alert notifying them which user initiated the alarm and gave them an instant feed of video from every GABRIEL shield on site. The mood in the building was one of curiosity, rather of panic. No gunshots, screaming, or other suspicious behavior was found

anywhere throughout the site. A message to the initiator received a quick response—the alert was accidental. The CEO called him to verify and walked down one flight of steps to triple-check that it was indeed a false alarm.



**Within three minutes, the entire incident was over, the building was declared safe, and the emergency response was called off.** Key lessons were gathered for training, and staff discussed how to leverage the situational awareness had this been a true emergency. Aside from an embarrassed staff member and a few minutes of excitement, there were more positive lessons learned than harm done.

### **Conclusion**

The right technology can save lives during a crisis, when seconds make all the difference. The best technology, however, prevents false alarms from escalating into crises, and when the unthinkable does occur, it helps police, emergency personnel, and people on site to rapidly address the situation, treat the injured, and restore calm. The costs of false alarms and protracted crises—in terms of trauma, business interruption, injury, and potential lawsuits—should factor into any organization’s crisis management plan.