

AlertNow Rapid Communications System Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some frequently asked questions parents may have regarding phone messages received from the school using the AlertNow Rapid Communications System.

I said “hello” and no message played. Why?

The AlertNow system plays the message as soon as the phone is picked up. However, errors can occur if the person repeatedly says “hello” or answers in a noisy environment (i.e. traffic, children playing, loud music or television, dogs barking, etc.). Generally, if a person offers an extended greeting such that it overlaps the AlertNow message, the system pauses, waits for silence, and replays the message from the beginning. With background noise, it is possible that the system was unable to detect the end of the “greeting” and thus the message did not initiate. *In a noisy environment, where silence is unattainable, call recipients can press any number (1-9) and the message will play from the beginning without interruption.*

How does the AlertNow system distinguish a live person from an answering machine?

In short, AlertNow utilizes the industry’s most Advanced Answering Machine Detection (AAMD) software. The system starts the broadcast immediately upon telephone pickup; simultaneously, it is listening for interruptions. If the system is not interrupted by noise or someone speaking within the first 3.5 seconds, the message is delivered in its entirety. If the system detects a greeting longer than a few seconds, the system treats this as an outgoing message from an answering machine and will wait for a pause (usually after the beep) before delivering the message to be recorded.

What if the line is busy or there is no answer?

The AlertNow system will make up to four attempts to reach each number, with three minutes in between each call. If the message is not delivered by the fourth attempt, it is considered a failed number. Failures happen when a phone number is busy, disconnected, invalid, etc.

Why is my answering machine recording only half of the message?

If the answering machine greeting is sporadic with varied periods of silence, the system will read this as a live person and begin playing the message, even though the machine has yet to start recording. This will result in a recording of silence (if the AlertNow message finishes playing before the machine begins recording) or of just the last portion of the AlertNow message. The recommended solution is to have parents re-record their outgoing message so that there are no pauses. If the answering machine is set to record for a specific amount of time (e.g. 30 seconds) and the AlertNow message runs longer than that, this will also result in message cut-off. The recommended solution is to have parents set their machines to record for a longer period. For voice mailboxes where it is necessary to enter a mailbox number, AlertNow is unable to leave a message.

- Note about Sprint/Nextel phones: Often when dialing a number in the Sprint/Nextel network, the caller hears a recording: “Please wait while we locate the subscriber you are calling.” Then there is silence. AlertNow interprets this as the correct time to begin playing the message. A recipient may pick up mid-message, or only part of the message may be left on their phone.
- Note about Alltel phones: The Alltel voicemail system requires the caller to press a number in order to leave a message, and if nothing is pressed, will begin recording about 10 seconds later. AlertNow cannot navigate menus, so this may result in a partial message being left.

My caller ID showed that the school had called but there was no voicemail. Why?

If there is a break or a substantial silence in the outgoing voicemail message, the system determines it has reached a live person and begins the message prior to the voicemail recording being engaged. Please make sure that the greeting is seamless to facilitate successful message delivery.

Why doesn't the school's phone number appear on the caller ID?

AlertNow passes the caller ID information to the local telephone carriers, but it is up to those carriers to pass it along to their customers. Different local telephone companies process caller ID information differently. Some provide the name associated with the number, while others do not. For example, a telephone company may require an individual to subscribe to "Advanced Caller ID" in order to receive the school name along with the phone number. Unfortunately, we have no control over this feature.

Will the system call phone numbers with extensions?

The AlertNow system only works with direct-dial phone numbers. The system is unable to navigate menus or extensions. (If the phone system allows the caller to immediately enter an extension, or there is a live receptionist, then AlertNow has a good chance of being successful in placing the call.)

I have a telemarketer screening device. How will that affect the call?

If a contact has a device on their telephone line designed to prevent automated phone systems from connecting (e.g. TeleZapper, Privacy Manager, Privacy Director, etc.), they may not receive the call. For example, with Privacy Director all unidentifiable incoming calls are rerouted and the callers must identify themselves for the call to go through. Because our system is automated, it will not identify itself; thus the call will not get through to the recipient. For screening systems that are dependent on Caller ID's, recipients can authorize access for their school's phone number through their device. Note that calls identified with the school's number on the Caller ID generally have no trouble getting through Privacy Manager type systems. Only calls with the non-standard emergency Caller ID of 411 tend to get caught up in Privacy Manager's net.

Additional Information on the ALERTNOW Service:

The system will leave a message on the contact's voicemail or answering machine. However, the system is set to ring each line six times. If your answering machine is set to pick up on seven or more rings, the message may not be delivered to your machine. Therefore, we encourage you to set your machine to six rings or fewer.

More information is available at www.alertnow.com.

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