



Case Study: Madison Festivals, Inc.

Behind the Scenes of Taste of Madison: Real-Time Event Operations via SMS

ORGANIZATION

Madison Festivals, Inc.

EVENT

Taste of Madison

CHALLENGE

Coordinating hundreds of vendors, volunteers, and staff members during one of Wisconsin's largest outdoor festivals.

AT A GLANCE

- 90 food and beverage vendors
- 275 volunteers
- Approximately 40 event staff
- Thousands of attendees
- Two-day outdoor event surrounding the Wisconsin State Capitol

THE CHALLENGE

Taste of Madison is one of the Midwest's premier food and music festivals, bringing together dozens of vendors, hundreds of volunteers, and event staff members across the Capitol Square.

For Event Manager Bonnie Oleson and her team, keeping everyone informed in real time has always been one of the most difficult parts of managing the event.

"Getting everyone on the same page is definitely the biggest hurdle. Communication is critical, especially when it comes to coordinating with the street teams that control access to the Square and making sure everyone knows exactly when the event is opening and what's happening in real time."

THE SOLUTION

Madison Festivals implemented Engage by Cell's text messaging platform to provide instant communication between headquarters, vendors, volunteers, and event staff.

"It seemed like the best way to communicate with everyone in real time — and I was right!"

Using text messaging, event leadership can instantly distribute operational updates to all vendors and staff with a single message.

Common communications include:

- Event opening and closing updates
- Weather notifications
- Health department inspections
- Operational changes
- Volunteer instructions
- Parking and arrival information
- Emergency communications

The platform also allows vendors to communicate directly with event headquarters through a centralized number, creating a more organized support system throughout the festival.



VENDOR SMS

REQUEST: Please help us tonight by bagging/tying up garbage and taking it directly to a nearby dumpster. Do not leave it in your booth. Lime green dumpsters can be found on N Fairchild, N & S Hamilton, and S Carroll.

EVENT STAFF SMS

Excited for tomorrow!
Reminder: meet Leah at HQ on W Wash 15 min before your shift for shirt, instructions & supplies. Parking is your responsibility - recommend city ramps.

VOLUNTEER SMS

Thank you for leading at Taste of Madison! Look for your bill.com payment invite. We loved working with you & hope to see you at the Madison Marathon Nov 7-9. Contact Rachel for signup info.

REAL-TIME PROBLEM SOLVING

One of the biggest advantages came during an unexpected operational issue involving garbage disposal procedures.

Instead of relying on staff members to physically relay information vendor-by-vendor, organizers were able to send updated instructions to everyone instantly.

“Being able to instantly update vendors with changes and instructions helped us manage the situation much more quickly and efficiently than we ever could have otherwise.”

BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR EVERYONE

The benefits extended beyond event management.

Vendors appreciated having direct access to event headquarters whenever questions or issues arose.

“Questions and problems could be addressed immediately, and we were able to dispatch the right people as quickly as possible.”

Previously, many vendor communications went directly to Bonnie’s personal phone, creating delays and bottlenecks.

With Engage by Cell, communications became centralized and accessible to the event team.

“It was so much more efficient than vendors texting my personal cell phone. With this system, there was one central number for communication, which made everything more organized and responsive.”

Volunteers also benefited from receiving important information before arriving on site.

“Our volunteers appreciated it because important updates, like where to park or where to report when arriving on site, could be communicated ahead of time before they even got to the event.”

THE RESULTS

Faster Communication

Critical updates delivered instantly to vendors, volunteers, and staff.

Significant Time Savings

Hours saved by eliminating manual communication chains and in-person message delivery.

Improved Vendor Experience

Direct access to event headquarters and faster issue resolution.

Better Event Operations

Real-time updates helped organizers respond quickly to changing conditions and operational challenges.

100% Vendor Adoption

All Taste of Madison vendors enrolled in the text messaging program.

“All of our vendors signed up for text messaging, which made communication during the event so much easier and more efficient.”

ADVICE FOR OTHER EVENT ORGANIZERS

When asked what she would tell other event organizations considering text messaging, Bonnie’s response was simple: “Just give it a try—you won’t regret it.”

“I honestly didn’t think we would use it as much as we did, but with outdoor events, things inevitably come up and you need a fast, reliable way to get information out to everyone immediately. We ended up using it far more than I ever expected, and the feedback from vendors was overwhelmingly positive.

And at the end of the day, if the vendors are happy, then I’m happy!”