

SUPERIOR SERVICE & TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

# Quick Thinking Helps University of Alabama-Huntsville Students Manage in Storm's Aftermath



## University of Alabama in Huntsville



### CHALLENGE

On April 26, 2011, a deadly series of tornadoes swept through much of the Southeast, leaving a path of destruction and devastation in its wake. But no state was hit as hard as Alabama, where thousands of citizens were displaced after their homes were destroyed.

For the 7,600 students at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAHuntsville), a time that should have been spent cramming for exams and looking forward to graduation suddenly turned into a living nightmare. Although UAHuntsville's campus, located at the southern edge of the Appalachian Mountains, did not sustain any damage, there were extensive power outages throughout the area for several days. Finals were cancelled, graduation was postponed and students were advised to go home if they could.

But with cell towers down and ATMs not operating due to the lack of electricity, students had no way to call their families or obtain the cash they needed to get home. That's when Barnes & Noble College, the operators of UAHuntsville's campus bookstore, stepped in with a plan to get the students home.

### SOLUTION

At each of its 630+ campus bookstores around the country, Barnes & Noble offers a BuyBack program that allows students to sell certain textbooks back to the bookstore at the end of the semester in exchange for cash. In the case of UAHuntsville, Barnes & Noble realized the students' urgent need for this cash, which would enable them to get home. But without electrical power, they needed another way to conduct business.

Relying on its solid technology systems, Barnes & Noble was able to dial into the University of Alabama at Birmingham and print the BuyBack forms from there. Barnes & Noble's regional manager, Bobby Hamous, then picked up the forms and drove to meet UAHuntsville's campus bookstore manager, Amber Hill, at the half-way point – a 100-mile round-trip journey for both of them. Using the paper forms, Amber was able to conduct the BuyBack process inside the Student Union Center that very weekend.

**“Within 15 minutes of my initial call, I received a call back and was advised that the BuyBack process would begin within two to three hours.”**

*John Maxon – associate vice president, UAHuntsville*



“I was most impressed with the can-do attitude that Amber and the Barnes & Noble staff expressed when I called and asked if there was any way we could provide BuyBack to the students without power,” said John Maxon, associate vice president at UAHuntsville. “There was no hesitancy in Amber’s replies, as it was not a matter of if this can be done – the question was, how best can we do it?”

With the campus shut down for two weeks, Barnes & Noble extended the return due date for all rental textbooks and the BuyBack period through the end of May. The bookstore also accepted returns of graduation regalia due to its postponement until August.

“Our store manager immediately understood the importance of getting cash into the students’ hands,” said Brian Stark, vice president of stores at Barnes & Noble College. “Without power on campus, Amber made a local decision to establish a manual BuyBack station so students could receive cash for their unneeded textbooks. One student said that the cash he received provided him with the needed gas money to drive home.”

## RESULTS

With quick thinking and a dedication to delivering the highest level of customer service, Barnes & Noble was able to help the students of UAHuntsville when they needed it the most. During this BuyBack period, Barnes & Noble was able to give up to 50 percent cash back to every student who had a book to sell.

“Within 15 minutes of my initial call, I received a call back and was advised that the BuyBack process would begin within two to three hours,” said Maxon. “Now that is dedication to the client and students!”

Although it would take time for life on campus to go back to normal, Barnes & Noble was able to relieve at least a small part of the students’ worries almost immediately.

“It’s extremely unsettling to have no access to cash in a situation like this,” said Amy, a third-year student at UAHuntsville. “But when we realized that Barnes & Noble was setting up these BuyBack stations and that we would be able to get cash this way, it was like a weight was lifted off of my chest. Thanks to them, I was able to go home and be with my family right away, which meant the world to me.”