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Opsgenie

6 Must-Haves When Using Slack for Incident Management

Important considerations and a comparison of functionality between Opsgenie, PagerDuty and VictorOps

Over the last few years, teams have realized the benefits of sharing and distributing knowledge in chat applications such as Slack. Today, teams are extending the use of these applications beyond collaboration by embracing ChatOps. ChatOps empowers teams by bringing complex day-to-day operational work into shared chat channels. If done correctly it drastically reduces context switching and increases the speed at which teams can tackle tough challenges.

Companies are realizing incredible benefits by incorporating ChatOps into their incident management workflows. Slack channels provide hyper-effective means to alert teams of issues, take immediate action, and collaborate with clarity and urgency. It is for this reason that companies like Opsgenie, PagerDuty, and VictorOps have invested in integrating their incident management applications into Slack.

Ideally, users of a modern incident management solution need to have access to a multitude of features so that they can address specific challenges directly within the chat tool. During an incident, switching between applications to access and collaborate on the actionable data is a waste of time. Keeping the conversation and action in one place, where team members already are, is the key to a fast and successful incident resolution process. That is why ChatOps has emerged as an alternative to the war room concept.

Contents

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A Note About Our Analysis

" Opsgenie, PagerDuty and VictorOps have Slack applications published in the Slack's marketplace, for good reason, as Slack is taking the lead in team collaboration.

In this part, we compare the Slack applications considering the six important features we described below. Each feature has one or more items corresponding to Slack's capabilities.

VictorOps has a native chat client as part of the product. While VictorOps prefers to bring its users to the product to collaborate and work on the incidents, Opsgenie and PagerDutyprefer to fully integrate with tools like Slack, HipChat, and Microsoft Teams. Opsgenie aims to bring all its functionality into the chat application where the whole team already works.

① Post Messages with Clarity

The basic requirement for integrating any application within chat tools such as Slack is to simply have messages posted within chat channels. However, there are three additional needs to consider when integrating an incident management tool into chat when increasing efficiency is the goal.

- The integration must be able to post chat messages regardless where the incident originates and additional information added (monitoring, ticketing, or collaboration tools).
- Messages need to be customized based on the specifics or severity of the incident. Often the basic message needs to be appended with tags or additional information fields.
- It is often advantageous to have messages accompanied by buttons which allow responders to take instant, prescriptive actions.

Opsgenie can send incident action notifications to Slack. You can choose which incident action and show/hide tags, description, assigned teams, or action buttons (useful for informative alerts) on the messages.

PagerDuty can send incident action notifications to Slack. You can choose which incident action but you don't have control over message structures.

VictorOps can send incident action notifications, on-call shift changes, and user notifications into a Slack channel. You can't choose which incident action and don't have control over message structures.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Send Incident Notifications	✅	✅	✅
Send on-call shift change notifications	⚠️	❌	✅
Ability to customize the chat message	✅	❌	❌

2 Control How Information is Shared

Posting every alert and comment into a shared channel can quickly become overwhelming and is considered bad practice. A strong integration enables the creation of separate channels for specific responders and have direct control over what types of alert and follow-up messages are shown.

A seamless integration also provides the flexibility to receive only the incident actions which are decidedly relevant. Low priority issues that don't require immediate action can be filtered and not sent to the chat stream, ensuring the team stays focused on what really matters.

> Opsgenie allows you to add more than one Slack application to different channels. You can install and configure applications for each team or service you have. You receive the actions you want, such as acknowledge, add note, close, or all other available actions. You can also filter alerts and incidents for each property by checking if one or more specified conditions are met. Only the alerts that match your conditions are sent to the channel.
>
> PagerDuty allows you to add more than one Slack application for each service. You receive the actions you want such as resolve, acknowledge or assignment actions. You can't filter incidents by checking if conditions are met at the integration level. VictorOps allows you to install one application for the account. You can't install applications for each team or service. You can't choose which incident actions are sent to the room but you can choose to receive notifications for all incident actions, shift change notifications, or paging notifications. You can't filter incidents by checking if conditions are met at the integration level.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Team/Service based installations	✅	✅	❌
Ability to configure which actions are sent to the room	✅	✅	⚠️
Ability to filter the alerts/ incidents based on the properties	✅	❌	❌

3 **Accelerate Actions**

ChatOps transforms Slack into a vehicle in which users take actions and deploy solutions. This virtually eliminates the need for operations teams to switch between applications when responding to an incident.

Most integrations enable users to execute incident actions using text commands. This method is valid and often preferred. However, deeper integrations simplify tasks by providing interactive buttons allowing users to start working on incidents with just a click. The value of responding to an alert by clicking a button extends beyond simple alert acknowledgement. Enabling all common responses (i.e. assigning an alert, taking ownership, adding notes, muting incidents, etc.) to be executed in this manner accelerates resolution and unlocks the real power of ChatOps.

> Opsgenie's Slack application supports buttons for most used actions like acknowledge, unacknowledge, or close. You can use interactive message menus to take this to the next step and assign alerts to a team member, take ownership, or snooze an alert. With the new Slack dialogs, adding a note to an alert requires a couple of clicks. You can also use the /genie command to execute actions from the chat interface.
>
> PagerDuty and VictorOps support buttons for acknowledge and resolve actions.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Execute incident actions using buttons	✅	✅	✅
Execute incident actions using message menus	✅	❌	❌
Execute incident actions using dialogs	✅	❌	❌
Execute incident actions using Slash commands	✅	❌	❌
Execute configuration actions (on-call scheduling and integration administration, etc) using Slash commands	✅	❌	❌

4 Instantly Retrieve Supporting Information

A challenge of a long chat thread is that critical information can get lost within the communications or additional information may be needed. A user might have to leave Slack to look up important details and related information. For example, they may wish to look at other open incidents or list current alert policies.

The integration of an incident management system into the chat environment needs to allow users to access supporting information at any time. The ability to query not only additional details about a specific incident but also general information regarding on-call schedules and alert policies is a requirement. By empowering team members to access this data directly within the chat interface, they stay focused and are able to respond in the most efficient manner possible.

> Opsgenie supports built-in slash commands with its Slack application. You can use slash commands to get all the details of an incident or list all your open alerts. You can also view other supporting information such as available integrations or policies.
>
> PagerDuty and VictorOps don't support this.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
View & List incident details in the channel	✅	❌	❌
View supporting information (such as integrations/policies) in the channel	✅	❌	❌

5 Create New Alerts

A common task when managing an incident is to create manual alerts. Again, requiring people to switch applications in order to complete this task is a distraction and slows the progress.

Creating new alerts for a team or service right within the chat channel is a necessity. The incident management system then notifies the person on-call automatically. Having the ability to create an alert directly within Slack empowers individuals that may not have direct access to the incident management system to report problems efficiently.

> Opsgenie's built-in slash command (/genie) supports creating new incidents. You can choose teams or recipients if you want.
>
> PagerDuty has slash command utility which is not out of the box available as part of the Slack application. Once that utility is installed manually, their Slack application supports creating new incidents.
>
> VictorOps doesn't support these features.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Create an incident from the channel	✅	✅	❌
Create an incident for specific teams or recipients	✅	❌	❌

6 Control Access

When an incident occurs, it is important that corrective action is taken by only the people who are authorized to respond. Mapping (or linking) the chat users to the users within the incident management system enables this level of control.

Linking the user profiles between the chat and incident management has additional benefits. As alerts are acknowledged and responded to within the chat environment, the events are recorded within the incident management solution. A clear history describing who took each action is recorded for future reporting and analysis.

> Opsgenie and PagerDuty give you the ability to optionally link Slack and their users. Unlinked users can also operate on the incident. This option is provided in the configuration and is up to the user. Users can also undo the action themselves.
>
> VictorOps allows linked users to execute actions. To be able to unlink the users, one needs to contact their support.

	Opsgenie	PagerDuty	VictorOps
Link chat users with the product's users	✅	✅	❌
Unlink chat users with the product's users	✅	✅	⚠️
Optional linking/sync	✅	✅	❌

While there are many things to consider when integrating incident management into a chat application, the benefits are clear. Response time, ability to collaborate, and team access to incident details are crucial factors for incident resolution. Opsgenie has the most benefits providing clarity, control, rapid response, access to incident details, and flexible configuration all within a Slack channel.

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Serhat is a versatile engineer who has built and operated products as part of the Opsgenie team since 2015. His main interest as the technical evangelist is helping teams build better on-call and incident response practices. He is also an AWS Community Hero and a proud member of Devopsdays core team.

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