

Technology Empowers Relief Efforts

In 2005 the Aidmatrix Foundation, a spinoff of the i2 Foundation, touched more than 50 million people globally with \$1 billion in aid. That aid was delivered not just in dollars, but in products and services and volunteer time. One of its biggest impacts was during Hurricane Katrina, as well as during the tsunami relief effort earlier in the year, and in other U.S. hurricanes after Katrina.

"Aidmatrix is an example," says CEO Scott McCallum, former governor of Wisconsin, "of what can happen when you combine technology with real-time connection and caring. And it's a new way of thinking about giving for companies: giving better and faster, and not just in dollars."

The benefit can surprisingly go both ways. As Aidmatrix COO-Global Amy Luz, a veteran fundraiser and development officer of such entities as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the National Jewish Medical & Research Center, and the Henry Ford Health System, explains: "Our job is not just to provide technology and expertise, but to catalyze an understanding among companies, foundations, and non-governmental and governmental entities about what can be done. We provide a bridge between the giving organizations and the recipients, but we're really in the business of providing hope. And employees of all sorts of organizations connect with that. We know that companies not only want to give but need to give. They want their employees to be proud of them and to know that they're contributing as both community and global citizens. It's not just about the tax write-offs and operational efficiencies."

Aidmatrix's job is not just to provide technology and expertise, but to catalyze an understanding about what can be done.

Still, those count, and Aidmatrix also teaches companies how to think of their donations of products as an extension of their supply chain. "We show manufacturers the benefit that can come from donating their distressed and obsolete or surplus inventory to aid efforts," says Aidmatrix CTO and COO Keith Thode. How so? "When we partner with a company, and Kraft is a good example, we help them optimize the donation process flow, making it better for them to donate product than to throw it away. Now Kraft effectively has a button on its supply chain system that says 'donate' as one of its options."

Adaptability of systems

Because Aidmatrix partners with charitable organizations that are key relief agencies, such as America's Second

Harvest and Adventist Community Services, it could hook into a network of food banks during Hurricane Katrina to ensure that donated foodstuffs from Kraft and similar companies got to warehouses predestined for disaster relief efforts and to the communities designated by the donors. And when some of these warehouses were washed away, it could send staff to establish new systems in new warehouse spaces.

"The thing about disaster relief efforts is, despite how much you plan or think you're prepared, the catastrophe



can be so great that you need to make decisions on the ground and adjust your plan on the fly," says Thode. Six Aidmatrix staff traveled to Louisiana when the Food Bank of New Orleans washed away and set up a new centralized warehouse with Internet connectivity and Aidmatrix's warehouse management solutions. The Aidmatrix staff collaborated with agency partnerships that were in place before the hurricane hit and used new, customized and enhanced software developed to incorporate the learnings from Hurricane Andrew more than a decade earlier.

Laptops and offline versions of critical software and Internet and cellular phone connectivity enabled the setups. But it wasn't just the hardware and systems that made the warehouses work. It was the learning about relief processes that has been ongoing over the past decade. How was the newly established warehouse going to operate? Who was going to train volunteers? Who would interface with trucking companies? Who would pay for transport?

"Relief systems have to incorporate these processes and be very easy to learn and operate," says Thode. "We tested a new system on the ground in New Orleans; there was no time for review. The system showed great improvement over what was in place at the time of Hurricane Andrew." Then, in 1993, six people from America's Second Harvest spent the majority of their time managing donations of food and consumer products into the area, thereby taking

During Hurricane Katrina

themselves out of the loop for other hunger-relief operations. In recent Florida hurricanes, these same processes were handled by only one person (250 truckloads of product going to 17 locations) because of improved processes and systems.

Handling volume

These customized systems are valuable because they have a high capacity for data and data crunching and they offer relief workers visibility into processes that need to be



implemented and actions that need to be taken. It's like having the instruction manual open to the right page and the instructor nearby for guidance. The warehouse solution employed during Katrina could also track product and report back to donors in a matter of hours rather than days or weeks, showing that targeted donations had reached their destinations.

Since Katrina, the Aidmatrix warehouse management tool has orchestrated more than 1.7 million pounds of humanitarian-aid goods in Louisiana and Texas. Aidmatrix has mobilized millions of dollars through its virtual-aid drives at companies, some of which was raised through a special portal set up by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The solutions have orchestrated more than 30 million pounds of food aid for distribution by food banks in 34 Gulf Coast communities affected by Katrina and Rita. More than 16 new corporate donors are utilizing Aidmatrix's Relief Exchange application to transform unneeded supplies from what would have been land-fill to life-affirming humanitarian aid.

Advanced systems and improved processes in these efforts free up the people resources on the ground to focus on making judgments and decisions as circumstances change, one of the critical capabilities still under scrutiny and development in disaster relief.

Aidmatrix Offers More than Disaster Relief

Founded in October 2000, Aidmatrix has developed several software platforms to help companies and relief agencies interact more efficiently and effectively in medical emergencies, hunger epidemics and natural disasters.

Its systems enable:

- Donations Management
- Relief Exchange
- Warehouse Management
- Fundraising Management

Aidmatrix's product/service array includes a volunteer clearinghouse, product donations exchanges and clearinghouses, and corporate employee and customer virtual-aid drives.

The foundation has partnered with several corporations to create these systems and processes for relief of human suffering, its avowed mission. While i2 has donated supply chain software solutions, Sun Microsystems has offered its database technology and hardware, Macromedia has offered its platform for fundraising development, ColdFusion has powered some of the applications and Accenture has provided some of the funding needed. As CTO/COO Keith Thode explains, one of the success factors of Aidmatrix is that "it has good source product from leading industry players, and our developers either customize or configure those products to the needs of the relief efforts we focus on."

For a list of Aidmatrix partners—both giving and receiving—see www.aidmatrix.org. To explore how to become a partner, please contact Melis Jones, Vice President for Business Development, at supply_chain_leader@i2.com.