



Case Study

3-1-1 & CRM Used to Facilitate Relief Services in the Aftermath of Hurricane "Katrina"

How Cities Can Learn from One Experience and Better Prepare for Future Disasters

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In 1997, the Federal Communication Commission dedicated a non-emergency phone number, "3-1-1", to be used by municipalities to help channel non-emergency calls to the correct resources. Since then, many cities and counties around the country have implemented 3-1-1 CRM (Citizen Relationship Management) solutions to better utilize the non-emergency lines to meet the needs of their citizenship. The earliest versions of these systems were predominantly targeted at incident management to help offload the abundance of non-emergency calls that were being placed through 9-1-1 Public Safety Centers. Over the past several years the function of 3-1-1 CRM call centers have grown to adapt to the local needs of its citizens, from day-to-day communications to disaster recovery.

The deadly hurricane season of 2005 has generated a growing concern among many communities across the country about their disaster preparedness strategies. Having a communications infrastructure in place has proven to be a critical life-saver in the event of a disaster. Specifically, a 3-1-1 call center backed by a CRM solution, can be adapted instantly to provide a centralized bureau for the administration of relief efforts.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation last year, one city leveraged the infrastructure it had in place to help provide immediate relief to displaced victims from New Orleans. While unaffected by the wrath of the natural disaster itself, the City of Hampton, VA was equipped to welcome roughly 500 evacuees from New Orleans into its city. Hampton was able to deliver emergency relief services to these citizens by making its 3-1-1 phone line accessible to the Red Cross, Salvation Army, local shelters and soup kitchens. Additionally, Hampton's 3-1-1 & CRM call center also helped to facilitate the donation of goods and services, the volunteer effort of concerned citizens wanting to help with the location of family members, shelter, food, medical attention and other basic services for evacuees.

Within 24 hours of the disaster in New Orleans, Hampton Councilwoman, Angela Leary, called on her fellow leaders to formulate a plan to welcome displaced hurricane victims into Hampton. "We had an initial meeting with the primary first responders to ensure that the victims of Katrina were able to gather information about where to go and what to do as soon as possible. This meeting involved concerned citizens, members of the business community and representatives from the local Salvation Army and Red Cross. At the time of this meeting, we were unsure of the scope of the disaster, but wanted to make sure that we would be prepared to help in any way possible. Our primary goal was to provide a centralized place for information sharing, so the pre-existing 3-1-1 call center infrastructure was quickly transitioned to our emergency communication hub. Anyone within the city limits was able to dial 3-1-1 for immediate information on available resources. Local TV and radio was used to spread the word about the 3-1-1 communication line," said Leary.

"When a victim called 3-1-1, we provided a list of the help available to them and the numbers to call for individual service providers. Relief efforts among local Hampton residents ranged from the donation of school supplies for students to free eye care for victims whom lost their glasses in the wake of the hurricane," said Leary.

Hampton leveraged its 3-1-1 call center to link with 17 local communities and cities to help people in the immediate area obtain the resources that they needed. According to Liz Nisley, Hampton's 3-1-1 Call Center Manager, "in the aftermath of Katrina, we met with local officials in neighboring communities to share our best practices and document our disaster recovery plan for the future. The 3-1-1 infrastructure was central to our immediate response in the wake of this terrible disaster."

Hampton decided to implement its initial 3-1-1 call center in 1999 after complaints from concerned citizens came to a head at a local meeting with a city leader where residents voiced their frustration concerning requests for service. They explained that it was not uncommon to be transferred up to seven times before reaching their department of choice. The city knew something had to be done to better meet the non-emergency concerns of their customers and deliver a higher, more efficient level of service.

After creating a centralized location for receiving calls, the city began looking for a CRM solution that would help to document the requests and further improve customer service. "We wanted our citizens to have a positive call center experience," says Nisley. The CRM component was a valuable addition to the existing call center infrastructure for increased reporting and documentation of claims/cases. For example, if multiple calls were received by the call center concerning the same complaint or request, Hampton did not have the technology required to efficiently access past claims. Using the example of a broken street lamp, a service repair operation could potentially respond to the same request multiple times without the reporting capabilities to identify the status of a request. Hampton was in need of a CRM tool to help manage such problems and avoid wasting valuable time and resources on repeat service requests.



"With the CRM component now in place, we expect to have better reporting capabilities and improved success with the classification of calls. During the Katrina crisis, we were able to respond to every phone call, but didn't have the ability to track the details of each case. As cities focus more on disaster preparedness, CRM is going to play an increasingly larger role across the U.S. in local government. People expect and deserve their government to be more responsive. It is encouraging that many of our callers validate that we are spending their tax dollars wisely," said Nisley.

In the aftermath of Katrina, we discovered that the 3-1-1 call center with the CRM component is no longer a luxury, but something that's critical for providing the core services our citizens need. You cannot afford to be without a 3-1-1 CRM infrastructure," said Leary.

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