

IBM provides critical aid and client support in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Overview

■ Challenge

Respond with speed to communities and IBM clients affected by a major natural disaster in the United States.

■ Solution

IBM utilized the skills and proven onsite support capability of the IBM Crisis Response Team—combined with coordination and specialized incident support from the IBM Business Continuity and Recovery Services Emergency Operations Center and IBM Corporate Community Relations—to deliver multiple targeted solutions and services to hurricane victims, government agencies, universities, hospitals and businesses that suffered loss and damage.

■ Moving toward On Demand Business

IBM will continue to evaluate the public and private responses to the hurricane to refine its processes and use of resources and improve efforts to help save lives in the case of future disasters.

■ Key Benefits

- *Improved management of the relief effort and assisted public sector response and recovery*
- *Provided direct humanitarian relief services*
- *Helped people displaced by the storm find shelter and services through support of relief organizations*
- *Saved jobs and businesses through IBM Business Continuity and Recovery Services*



Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 storm that struck the Gulf Coast region of the United States in August 2005, was responsible for the deaths of more than 1,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands from their homes. The storm is expected to impact the businesses and public infrastructure of the region for many years to come. IBM responded to the crisis with a commitment of people and resources to meet the needs of the affected communities and businesses.

Arriving on the scene

The IBM Crisis Response Team (CRT), supported by the IBM Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Sterling Forest, New York, began monitoring Katrina before it crossed Florida. IBM employees in the region and members of the IBM EOC and the Crisis Response Team were put on alert. EOC representatives—call handlers, project managers, engineers and other IBM experts—began talking to clients about their preparations as the storm churned across the Gulf of Mexico.

>> On Demand Business defined

An enterprise whose business processes—integrated end-to-end across the company and with key partners, suppliers and customers—can respond with speed to any customer demand, market opportunity or external threat.

“Our first focus is on supporting disaster victims. We understand the need to minimize losses, coordinate relief efforts, communicate effectively and help communities get back on their feet after the immediate danger has passed. I’m proud that the experience and significant resources of IBM are being used to ease suffering and help accelerate recovery efforts following crisis events such as Hurricane Katrina.”

*—Brent Woodworth,
manager, Crisis Response Team, IBM*

Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005. As news of catastrophic damage and the breaching of the levees that protected New Orleans trickled in, it became clear that a full-scale response would be required. The IBM Crisis Response Team converged in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a second EOC was activated in Boulder, Colorado.

“The Crisis Response Team communicated to us that we were dealing with a disaster of significant magnitude that would require a full response,” says Robin Willner, Vice President, Global Community Initiatives, IBM. “Based on their request, Corporate Community Relations authorized the donation of US\$3.2 million market value in IBM technology and services.”

The IBM Crisis Response Team, working with IBM’s Corporate Community Relations leaders, was tasked with determining the most appropriate use for those resources. The team was composed of IBM employees selected for their unique skill sets and some highly skilled subcontractor personnel—all of whom had proven to be self-sufficient in crisis conditions and able to deliver critical services under extreme conditions. The team also included specialists in military coordination, federal and state emergency management, information technology, communications, engineering, medical services and trauma management.

“One of the great strengths of IBM is that we not only have a Crisis Response Team that knows how to listen and respond, but we have IBM employees in every locality,” says Willner. “So whether it’s Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan or New Orleans, we have IBM people who understand the community, who know the people we should contact and who know both the resources required and the resources available.”

Springing into action

IBM team members were in direct contact with federal, state and local officials, interacting with the governors’ offices of Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, as well as the governors’ emergency offices. IBM also occupied a seat at the State of Louisiana Emergency Operations Center and the Federal Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge (the main federal operating center working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal responders). These team members provided advice and expertise, and served as touch points between the authorities and agencies that needed help and the available IBM resources.

“This close cooperation allowed us to provide the right assistance at the right time, and be proactive about directing our resources where they could deliver the greatest benefit,” says Brent Woodworth, manager of the IBM Crisis Response Team.

Within hours of the storm, IBM provided equipment and supplies to the United Way and American Red Cross for processing evacuees and supporting relief workers, and quickly set up a call center to handle financial donations for relief efforts.

Managing the chaos

The chaotic evacuation of thousands of people from the area to shelters around the country created enormous challenges for the IBM team. Displaced individuals needed to reconnect with missing family members and loved ones. Many local residents needed help in finding a place to live and obtaining the services their families needed. One of IBM's solutions included the use of a database technology from IBM Entity Analytics Solutions. This system was used for collecting and processing information needed to facilitate the missing person reunification process. IBM also provided hardware to Texas Health and Human Services to quickly register and process evacuees.

IBM provided application development and hosting services for a variety of relief efforts, such as: a new front-end interface for www.Jobs4Recovery.com, an online employment search sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; support for the Points of Light Foundation for its online volunteer-matching Web site, www.1800volunteer.org; and a housing match application that allowed evacuees in Houston to search for rental homes and apartments. To help children transition to new schools throughout the region, IBM donated KidSmart Early Learning Centres (Lenovo Young Explorer PCs with a Little Tykes interface and preloaded educational software). IBM Crisis Response Team "Trauma Docs" were also brought in to help address the emotional trauma issues being faced.

Recovering faster with fewer disruptions, through preparation

Though personal security and the safety of people are the highest priorities, helping the business community to respond and recover from a disaster like Katrina is also a responsibility of IBM. People need jobs to recover. Clients, large and small, throughout the region called for help, and IBM answered.

Many clients were fortunate to have IBM Business Continuity and Recovery Services contracts that helped them weather the storm. Each affected Business Continuity and Recovery Services client is unique and experienced Katrina in a different way; but, they all had one thing in common—preparation and planning.

Oreck Corporation, a well-known vacuum and air cleaner manufacturing company with plant operations in Mississippi and headquarters in New Orleans, was able to provide an appropriate response to the disaster, because its executive management team understood the organization's vulnerability and developed a plan to address every layer of the business. During the planning process, IBM helped the company determine that it could delay production for

“The way we pulled together really made me proud. I didn’t know most of these people before Katrina, but within a day, they were my best friends. And we’ll be friends, by name, forever, because we became a family during this time of helping our clients.”

—Pat Corcoran, manager, Marketing and Development, IBM Business Continuity and Recovery Services

two weeks but would need to ensure minimal interruption to sales capabilities. To that end, the company had a recovery contract for its technology systems and performed a twice yearly exercise of the plan.



When Katrina struck, the plan was put into action. With the help of IBM, Oreck moved its technology team to the IBM recovery site in Boulder, Colorado, and most of its headquarters employees—and their families—to another city where they worked on an IBM campus. IBM also helped Oreck procure housing and respond with crisis communications. IBM provided additional, nontechnical support, such as arranging crisis counselors, reviewing the company's insurance coverage and providing human resources services. Employees at the manufacturing facility, 70 percent of them single mothers, were also given support in the form of food and shelter and assistance in applying for aid. Just as important, they had jobs when the plant reopened in two weeks.

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Corporate Marketing
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Armonk, NY 10504
U.S.A.

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Helping all clients get back to business

IBM clients without recovery contracts also sought help from IBM after Katrina. Floodwaters wiped out one Louisiana school district's entire IT infrastructure, and without it, the district could not process its payroll. For teachers and administrators who were scattered by the evacuations, being paid was critical. The district backed up its data at an offsite location, but it had no recovery plan. IBM provided, on an as-available basis, the hardware resources and application resources to make payroll for several payroll cycles.

A government client needed to relocate data center operations in New Orleans to a new location in Baton Rouge. The data center, located on the fifth floor of a building without working elevators, was threatened by hot and damp conditions. The CRT and the EOC worked with the client to help arrange to remove the equipment. IBM service technicians prepared the equipment for transport, built shipping crates from scratch and provided advice on extricating the equipment from the building. After the move, IBM technicians were able to bring it back online.

"I don't think there were many IBM divisions that weren't involved in our response. We provided physical space, computing capacity, new, used or loaned equipment, project management skills, technical skills, network capacity, even equipment disposal, plus our corporate giving," says Pat Corcoran, manager, Marketing and Development, IBM Business Continuity and Recovery Services.

Global risks demand a global response

It is a reality of global business: Disasters of all types will occur, and they will affect IBM clients and the communities where IBM employees and our clients live and work. Yet it is precisely this global reach, together with the collected experience and expertise of IBM employees, that enables IBM to respond in times of crisis.

"We must continue to work on improving public/private partnership relationships, communication, planning and education" says Woodworth. "The lessons from Katrina will guide us in the future as communities and businesses strive to build their level of resiliency through proactive mitigation and preparedness actions."