

FEMA Adds Valuable Tool for Emergency Communications

In any emergency, communication is your most valuable asset. Whether the disaster is natural- a hurricane, earthquake or wildfire; biological or man-made, FEMA must provide real-time communication to the public and its emergency responders. Utilizing GovDelivery's email and digital subscription management service allows FEMA officials to communicate quickly and effectively. This type of communication by FEMA is instrumental throughout a disaster – from the onset of the disaster to providing information about preventing or mitigating the effects during, and through the recovery and rebuilding stages afterwards.



“Our ROI is more lives saved and less property and fewer homes destroyed or damaged.”

- Eugene Luke, FEMA Emergency Management Specialist

The 2007 California Wildfires burned over 500,000 acres, destroyed over 2,000 homes and displaced over 1,400 people. The years 2004-2005 were the most active 24-months ever witnessed in the Atlantic basin, resulting in a record 13 hurricanes. Terrorist attacks on 9/11 killed 2,823 people; underground fires at the World Trade Center continued to burn for 69 days; and workers cleaned up debris at Ground Zero for 230 days. Every year, millions of Americans face disaster and its terrifying consequences.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (www.fema.gov) states its mission “is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation.”

Situation

In keeping with its mission, FEMA continually looks for ways to improve communication, provide education, and increase awareness of available programs. FEMA identified a need to improve upon two communication channels – email and website. Specifically, they were looking to streamline the email communication process in a time of emergency as well as for informational emails, while driving people to their website for information. FEMA had begun development of their own software to generate emails when they learned of GovDelivery's Digital Subscription Management (DSM) solution. After evaluating the GovDelivery solution, FEMA realized it could address both communication needs – improved email communication and increased website usage with one solution. The GovDelivery solution also allowed FEMA to consolidate numerous email lists and have one system to send to subscribers automatically, saving time and money while improving communications.



RESULTS

Since launching GovDelivery in September 2007 FEMA has:

- Sent more than **800,000 emails** to subscribers.
- Sent more than **3.5 million** bulletins.
- Used the *Questions* feature to gather additional information on subscribers, and further target emergency alerts.
- Signed up more than **25,000 subscribers** with an average of **4.7 subscription items** per subscriber.
- Incorporated nearly **70 subscription items** including:
 - National and Regional News Releases
 - Employment Opportunities
 - National Response Framework Updates
 - Emergency and Major Disaster Declarations

Email is an effective way to proactively reach thousands when urgent situations arise. As the number one use of the Internet, email is a channel that plays a critical role in any emergency communication strategy. Email is unrivaled as a means through which public sector agencies can deliver detailed instructions to a broad audience during both the preparedness and response phase.

More than ever, citizens are going to the Internet when emergencies hit. During hurricane Katrina, people flocked to libraries to get online and seek the latest news.

In addition to email as a means of communication, many go to websites to get more information. FEMA had also been looking to increase Website traffic and program awareness. GovDelivery's Digital Subscription Management allows government agencies to send targeted email and wireless alerts to citizens based on geographic locations. GovDelivery's system was more cost-efficient than operating in-house, and with its greater capabilities, FEMA believed that the DSM system could be leveraged in emergency situations; delivering emergency alerts to concerned citizens.

Homeland Security was aware that FEMA was considering using GovDelivery and decided to purchase it for its agencies. Since they had shown interest in it, FEMA was asked to pilot the DSM system. FEMA planned to utilize the system as a means to assist people in obtaining aid during a disaster and in dealing with the aftermath, viewing GovDelivery as a valuable tool for emergency communications.

Solution

On September 12, 2007, FEMA launched GovDelivery's Digital Subscription Management system, and became a part of an elite group of government agencies with a focus on proactive communication with the public and their constituents. GovDelivery's DSM system is an automated system that uses email, wireless alerts or RSS to keep citizens informed when new information is available on topics of interest. The email alerts are provided to subscribers based on the FEMA website content.

In addition to utilizing GovDelivery's automated email alerts and RSS feeds, FEMA leverages the subscriber segmenting feature - *Questions*. This feature helps agencies improve their customer service by gathering details such as zip code, state or territory, thus allowing email communication to be based on region.

Besides email addresses, FEMA collects zip codes and state or territory information. With this information, when the President declares a disaster, FEMA has the ability to communicate with all subscribers within a given disaster area. They are able to pass along targeted information about how to obtain assistance, let residents know what the federal response is, and provide tips on rebuilding. For example, FEMA used GovDelivery during the California wildfires to send important information to California subscribers.

*(visit the FEMA California Wildfire page here:
http://www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/ca_2007.shtm.)*

Results

As email alerts increase traffic to FEMA.gov, more people are aware of preparedness plans that help in FEMA's goal of reducing loss of life and property. Being able to reach out to more people through GovDelivery has a positive impact on the people and communities who need FEMA's help in preparing for disasters, obtaining assistance, and dealing with the aftermath. The return on investment is great for FEMA as it can be expressed most clearly in lives saved and property damage prevented.

To receive FEMA's free email updates, go to www.fema.gov or <http://www.fema.gov/help/getemail.shtm>.

GovDelivery is the world's leading provider of government-to-citizen communication solutions. GovDelivery's Digital Subscription Management solution is a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform that provides organizations a fully-automated, on-demand public communication system.

Sources:

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