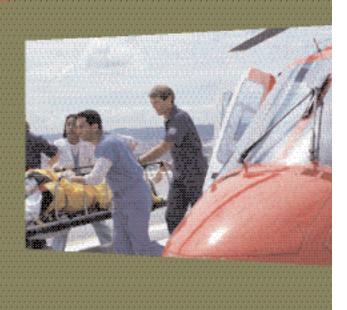BOWMAN
systems

> Bowman Systems Case Study
Coordinated Assistance Network

> Summary

When disaster strikes, it's vital for relief agencies to react quickly – but it's just as important for them to be thorough and efficient. People seeking help should not have to go from agency to agency only to be asked the same questions. Nor should they have to carry their documentation around to prove, again and again, that their claims are legitimate. Clearly, one of the lasting lessons of 911 is that national-level relief agencies needed a way to cooperate – a way to make sure their services got to victims more quickly, in a more coordinated way, thus saving time and ensuring less duplication and reducing fraud at the same time.

One answer to those challenges is the Coordinated Assistance Network, or CAN – an unprecedented collaborative network of nonprofit organizations utilizing Bowman Systems software.

> Challenges

There were several. First, there had to be a way to find a way for national-level agencies to cooperate seamlessly and quickly during the confusing and chaotic aftermath of a disaster, whether a hurricane, an attack or another event. This would have to be done without adding an additional layer of bureaucracy. Additionally, care had to be taken to ensure that the new program would not adversely affect the agencies' ability to provide services. Any solution would have to be fair, precise and equitable not only to clients but to the agencies as well.

> Agencies

The organizations collaborating to develop CAN are the American Red Cross; the United Way; the Salvation Army; the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD); the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS); the 9/11 United Services Group; and Safe Horizon.

> Searching for the solution

Only a Web-based solution would be able to bridge the varying agency technology platforms while still enabling a quicker, smoother response and providing the flexibility needed for field workers to do their jobs amid the chaos of a disaster's aftermath. Additionally, security could not be compromised. And yet whatever platform was chosen would have to be able to flow information seamlessly among the favorite platforms of the various agencies After looking at several possible solutions, the winner was ServicePoint by Bowman Systems, the company that develops and markets the world's most trusted, secure and comprehensive Web-based workflow software for the human services industry. ServicePoint, the Consumer Information Management System of choice among social service agencies, was selected because:

> It is easily customizable; no development staff would be needed, which meant it could be implemented more quickly and with less money.
> It could handle any data importing asked of it, thanks to its XML-enabeled flexibility.
> It is easy to use, and thus would quickly become the tool of choice for everybody from field workers with notebooks in their pockets to agency administrators trying tasked with budgeting, fraud reduction and allocating resources.

"The ability to integrate is a key factor," said Ross Feldman, director of the Coordinated Assistance Network project. "And Bowman's willingness to work with us was big."

> Results

Phase One of the efforts by the Coordinated Assistance Network is now in place. This took about eight months and resulted in a working prototype of a system that will provide better cooperation and coordination among agencies during a major national disaster. This working prototype is being rolled out in southern California, and will soon be helping agencies still providing aid in the wake of recent devastating wildfires

"It is up and running now and it's helping the agencies share information to help with the recovery efforts," said Feldman.

Also, Feldman said, work has started on Phase Two. This will involve expansion of the program and its capabilities to six pilot cities. This phase will take three years, and fundraising has started to support that phase.

Through it all, Feldman said, ServicePoint has proven to be robust, flexible and ready to take on added responsibilities.

"It is essentially an out-of-the-box version," said Feldman. "We tightened up the search capabilities to concentrate on using more specific search criteria. We don't have any need for wildcard searches."

Overall, he said, the idea was simply to make sure agencies could share knowledge.

"It's not so much a speed issue," said Feldman. "It's a facilitation issue. The power of this system comes in during a victim's second and third visits and subsequent visits to other agencies. Just having to walk around all the time and carrying all your paperwork and having to explain everything again and again – there's no reason that the system should make people relive their experiences again and again."

Another possible result, he said, will be better reporting of agency activities, which could in turn lead to less fraud and duplication and better use of limited resources.

"It's not really impacting how they manage cases," Feldman said. "It's helping them share information. The caseworker will have more information to make better decisions. The reduction in fraud and reduction in duplication will be side benefits."

"This historic project marks the beginning of an important new era in the way our country handles and recovers from disasters," Feldman added.

Bowman Systems is proud to be a leading part of it.

For more information:
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