

About Shelter from the Storm

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast region, becoming the costliest natural disaster- as well as one of the five deadliest hurricanes- in the history of the United States. The catastrophe was unprecedented, with over 90,000 square miles (an area almost as large as the United Kingdom) being declared a disaster area, over 300,000 households being evacuated, and over 700,000 people requiring some level of federal assistance.

Shelter from the Storm, a one-hour concert television special and telethon was scheduled to benefit the victims of the storm, lead by CBS and NBC. The event would be broadcast on four other major networks, and broadcast to over 100 countries across the globe, with all donations going to the American Red Cross or The Salvation Army.

Challenge

The networks needed to find a reliable strategic partner with extensive experience supporting telethons managing large scale events. The networks needed a partner that could address the following critical issues:

- Leverage an existing technology infrastructure and relationships to immediately launch the telethon;
- Integrate additional facilities for telecom, web, donor processing, and real-time reporting and performance management;
- Enlist the help of leading Fortune 500 companies to donate call center seats and agents, and integrate these seats with the existing infrastructure;
- Meet the event's scalability and capacity expectations, with early estimates of 25,000 agents required to hand calls;
- Provide real-time payment processing and reporting, to track the performance;



- Provide immediate response to inbound calls, yet be able to efficiently maximize donations;
- Minimize costs to ensure the majority of contributions would benefit those in need;
- Coordinate the resources and support of two of the Nation's largest non-profits, The Salvation Army and the American Red Cross.

Finally, all of the above would need to be planned, coordinated and executed in only one week!

Solution

AnswerNet Education Services leveraged its Large Scale Event Management team, including public relations experts, sales and marketing staff, network engineers, management, and call center staff to flawlessly execute the event. The team worked diligently to integrate all inbound call centers, web services, donation processing, donor database management, phone bank administration, and other services onto a single technology platform.

Existing corporate relationships from past events with the American Red Cross were leveraged to provide additional call center seats and agents within the limited time frame. Additionally, a donor database management and follow up strategy was implemented, maximizing each donor's lifetime value for the charities.

Results

The event proved to be one of the most successful telethons in history, being simulcast worldwide to over 100 different countries.

AnswerNet's efforts resulted in:

- Over 30 companies, including Ford, Verizon Wireless, AT&T, and others committed to donating call center seats and other resources, exceeding a value of \$8.9 million
- Actual costs were less than 1% of donations, ensuring over 99% of funds raised went directly to charities
- A donor database was managed that supported hundreds of thousands of callers throughout the event as well as future follow ups
- Integration of all 80+ facilities was accomplished in days
- Data and telecom were uninterrupted throughout the event
- All payment processing and reporting occurred in near-real time, allowing charities to recognize funds almost immediately
- Refunds and donor discrepancies were almost non-existent
- By November 9th, almost 1 million contributions were captured via the American Red Cross' 1-800-HELP NOW line, totaling \$144,313,000
- Capacity infrastructure coordinated by AnswerNet was so extensive that only 26% was in use during peak response periods
- All leading required performance metrics were exceeded, including Donor Issues/Complaints, Average Call Length, Average Hold Times, Data Entry Errors, Average Contribution, and Credit Card Up-sells.

The event became one of the largest, most successful telethon in history, benefiting both the Salvation Army and the American Red Cross.

