

helping Haiti through supply chain discipline

ALAN helps deliver the right aid to the right need

While the outpouring of international aid to the disaster in Haiti has been in many ways unprecedented, it has and will continue to face challenges common to all relief efforts. "Getting the right kind of aid to the right people at the right time is a huge challenge," said **Richard Sharpe**, SC50 member and vice president, process and technology for American Logistics Aid Network (ALAN). "What better discipline to apply to this problem than supply chain?"

Making the most urgent needs visible

After the earthquake in Haiti, already fragile infrastructure was left inoperable, including the main port. "Port-au-Prince is the primary artery that supplies the whole country with the basics of life," Sharpe said. This forced agencies to strictly prioritize the most immediate needs critical to saving lives. Delays due to mismatched shipments or poor communication could not be afforded.



"Without a direct line of sight into what is needed, the wrong kind of aid could be sent and wasted," Sharpe said. "That is a 'push' system and it doesn't work."

Serving relief agencies such as the American Red Cross, ALAN provides a system that aid workers on the ground in Haiti can use to request specific needs. Donors within ALAN's network can then provide more effective assistance. ALAN also helps coordinate the delivery of matched aid.

"We're simplifying the communication between donors and those asking for help," said Sharpe. "It's truly a 'pull' signal that is triggered by the agencies themselves. Visibility is the key."

Supply chain leaders respond

ALAN was created in the fall of 2005 after leaders in the supply chain industry saw the problems occurring in response efforts to Hurricane Katrina. "People were trying to do good by cleaning out basements and figuring out what they could send down," said Sharpe. "But in fact it was just clogging up the entire response effort."

Following the 2005 Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals meeting, 15 supply chain organizations came together to find ways they could help the disaster response effort become more efficient. "We studied the way disaster responses actually occur," said Sharpe. "We realized that the vast majority of aid work is done by relief agencies that are recognized by state and federal governments, but are actually managed independently."

These groups include the American Red Cross, Feeding America and The Salvation Army, etc.—also known as VOADs: Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. Since these agencies are recognized by the government, they have direct access to what is happening on the ground. "We determined these were the groups ALAN would serve," said Sharpe. "The best way we could provide assistance would be to create a 'pull' system in which the VOADs could go into the disaster area, determine what their needs are, put them into a special Web portal along with the precise delivery location and their contact information. ALAN serves as a central point of contact for the logistics industry, consolidating these requests and broadcasting them to the members of our network."

Donors who can meet specific donation requests are also able to make direct contact with the requestor to confirm the match. "Once the confirmation is made, donors can simply fill in their information and click 'donate,'" said Sharpe.

Portal provides window into needs

Because visibility is key, the web-based portal is critical. ALAN partnered with Aidmatrix—a non-profit technology organization—to create the portal. It went live days before Hurricane Gustav hit the U.S. and it delivered results almost immediately.

“A New Orleans charity needed wheelchairs and walkers to evacuate a nursing home,” said Sharpe. “A group in Chicago saw the need on the portal. They had a warehouse full of chairs and walkers to donate. They were delivered and in use within a few days.”

The portal offers even greater advantages now for Haiti, and it has helped numerous donors to respond efficiently and effectively to relief needs.

The screenshot shows the Aidmatrix website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Give, Volunteer, About Aidmatrix, and Help. Below this is a search section with fields for Need Category, Sub Category, and Need Description, along with buttons for Search and Show All. Below the search section is a table titled 'New Needs' with columns for Row #, Priority, Description, Category, Sub-Category, Recipient, Min. Qty., UOM, Reason #, Date, and Needs. The table contains several rows of data, including needs for cases of A&C bandages, ACE bandages, dental surgery, and patient gowns.

| Row # | Priority | Description | Category | Sub-Category | Recipient | Min. Qty. | UOM | Reason # | Date | Needs |
|---------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Details | Details | N1987 | High | Cases of A&C bandages | Medical | General Supplies | 10.00 | Cases | 3/25/2010 | Powered By |
| Details | Details | N1908 | High | Abdominal dressing | Medical | General Supplies | 1.00 | Cases | 3/25/2010 | Powered By |
| Details | Details | N1909 | High | ACE bandages | Medical | General Supplies | 1.00 | Cases | 3/25/2010 | Powered By |
| Details | Details | N1912 | High | Dental Surgery, Patient Gowns | Apparel | Hygiene/Cleaning/Outfit | 1.00 | Each | 3/24/2010 | Powered By |
| Details | Details | N1985 | High | Tape | Medical | Equipment | 1.00 | Cases | 3/23/2010 | Powered By |

ALAN complements current giving partnerships

Sharpe pointed out that ALAN is not designed to replace relationships that donor companies may already have with other agencies. “It’s very complementary,” said Sharpe. “A very large food manufacturer who is working with us already has a relationship with groups they have committed to help in a disaster. ALAN gives them the capability to see if more than food is needed. There could also be a need for a forklift or a certified driver.”

Relationships improve long-term success

As the effort in Haiti moves beyond saving lives, needs and requests will change. Enhancements to the portal and to donor opportunities are continually being made to anticipate this.

W.W. Grainger (represented in SC50 by D.G. Macpherson), for example, recently became what is known as a registered donor. “Registered donors can fill out a one-time profile which includes what kinds of needs they would like to help with and what they have to offer,” said Sharpe. “When a matched need comes up, they are notified. This is a very good thing for the situation in Haiti because the needs are going to change.”

Even though not yet requested, Grainger was able to make airborne disease-resistant face masks available to the Haiti effort. When the need does arise, workers on the ground, including those using connected portals through organizations such as CARE, will be able to see the masks that are available before making a new request. This approach allows the creation of a “virtual warehouse.”

Monsanto (represented in SC50 by Brad Morgan) has also approached ALAN about airlifting pallets of seed corn into Haiti, and SC50 special advisor Kevin Smith has been working with ALAN to find ways his experience and contacts within the pharmaceutical and retail industries might be able to help.

Sharpe believes these kinds of relationships are key to the long-term success of relief efforts, especially in Haiti. “The needs there will continue to grow,” said Sharpe. “Disease outbreaks and adequate shelter before the hurricane season are now major concerns. This is going to be a long-term effort that will require assistance in every aspect of rebuilding.”

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