

## **Mobilizing Online Resources in Response to Breaking News**

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The December 2004 Asian tsunami provided a good example of how large disaster-aid agencies responded online to natural disasters.

Relief organizations such as Oxfam America, CARE USA and Save the Children put their online tools through the most rigorous paces, with massive Website traffic volume, and a constant flow of online donations.

To date, the Internet has accounted for over \$350 million in tsunami relief contributions, eclipsing the previous online record of \$211-million after the September 11th attacks in the U.S.

Organizations of all types, sizes and issues can harness the unique opportunity of breaking news events, and the Internet is an ideal medium for communicating and engaging with stakeholders when these events occur.

A rapid response opportunity can be tied to any number of breaking news events, ranging from an external happening such as a natural disaster, crime, legislative activity or war, to news that an organization is able to create itself, including a report release or press release.

To respond rapidly, you should:

**Act Fast.** Be prepared to respond within 24 hours. That means you need to prepare in advance. Do you have a decision making process? Can your online fundraising system handle thousands of simultaneous transactions? You're not going to succeed if you're figuring these things out after the crisis has passed.

**Ask.** A good rapid-response campaign should have an action element as part of it – something that the public can do to help solve the problem. Ask for just one thing at a time – don't muddy your message by describing 12 different things they can do.

**Reach Out.** Reach out to your in-house email lists, ask them to take action and to tell their friends. Then reach out to online media, bloggers, online discussion forums, email newsgroups, partner organizations and others, to spread your message far and wide.

**Make it Easy.** Create a specific web page where the public can take the specific action, and drive Web traffic to that page as you conduct your outreach. Don't make people dig through your site to get to the action page.

**Synchronize.** Make sure that your online and offline efforts are synchronized. The messages should reinforce one another, the website links should be in all materials both online and offline, and the request for help should be identical in both mediums.