



# THE COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM

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## CASE STUDY

LOCATION:  
*Grandville, Michigan,  
United States*

YEAR:  
*2006*

STATUS:  
*Laureate*

CATEGORY:  
*Business and Related Services*

NOMINATING COMPANY:  
*Adobe Systems*

### ORGANIZATION:

**Crisis Care Network**

### PROJECT NAME:

**CrisisCoach - Disaster Response**

### Summary

Leveraging technology and over 10 years of experience responding to more than 20,000 requests from employers for onsite support of personnel following natural and man-made disasters in the workplace, Crisis Care Network contracted with WorkLife Media, a subsidiary of LifeOptions Group, Inc., to develop a web application, CrisisCoach, to overcome time and distance barriers associated with disasters. CrisisCoach accelerates individual and organizational recovery following disasters by providing employees otherwise unable to physically access services with secure, online coaching from critical incident response specialists, online behavioral health assessments to gauge level of need, a multimedia knowledge base, and individualized, media-rich interactive programs to aid recovery.

Crisis Care Network specifically deployed CrisisCoach to serve US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) personnel who were limited in their ability to physically access or otherwise benefit from the onsite counseling and support resources deployed by CCN to several USACE bases located throughout the New Orleans area.

### Introductory Overview

Business disruption and productivity losses secondary to natural and man-made disasters are increasing. 2005 brought unprecedented hurricane-related losses and now threats of global warming-related natural disasters and pandemic loom.

Employers rely on critical incident response assistance to mitigate the impact of critical incident-related business disruption by aiding employee recovery. Leading worldwide health organizations such as the World Health Organization agree: immediate delivery of practical assistance, information and resources to those impacted by critical incidents aids individual and organizational recovery.

Unfortunately, local and regional disruptions in infrastructure and business continuity associated with critical incidents in the workplace such as natural and man-made disasters often leave employees scattered, isolated and disconnected from their employer thereby increasing uncertainty and distress, and ultimately prolonging recovery.



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Building on its success developing an asp-based web application (CCNetWeb) to support real-time reporting and communications between employers and critical incident response specialists during a crisis, Crisis Care Network once again turned to web technology to broaden the range and the reach of its critical incident response resources.

Crisis Care Network first deployed CrisisCoach to the US Army Corps of Engineers. USACE faced significant challenges in response to Hurricane Katrina because its personnel had to maintain a sustained (months long) response to the disaster despite disruptions in their personal lives (many lost their own homes), and negative public perception regarding the Corps. Furthermore, the housing and infrastructure disruption caused by the disaster required Corps personnel to work in the field for extended hours which increased levels of stress while at the same time limiting access to CCN's onsite support counselors. CrisisCoach overcame these disaster-imposed barriers by providing USACE personnel with the media-rich, online recovery resources including the ability to communicate via live confidential chat with critical incident response specialists.

### Benefits

CrisisCoach expands the spectrum and availability of critical incident response services. When large scale disasters occur, whether man-made such as a structural collapse or natural such as a hurricane or pandemic, organizations need to be able to quickly communicate a clear course of action to those impacted. Individual and organizational recovery depends on situational awareness and a broad continuum of support tailored to the unique needs of the individuals involved. CrisisCoach, and the nationwide network of critical incident response specialists supporting it, provide employers with the information and resources to make informed decisions and extend expert, personalized, 24/7 support to their employees who might otherwise be unreachable. Employers who proactively facilitate individual and organizational recovery will more effectively mitigate costs associated with disaster and return to productivity sooner.

CrisisCoach represents the first disaster response web application with the necessary technical specifications and (HIPAA) security protocols to support the delivery of the psychological first aid guidelines now being introduced by global health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition to providing a wealth of searchable, Harvard-reviewed trauma and disaster recovery content, personalized assessments and media-rich programs focused on recovery, CrisisCoach raises the bar by being the first to add 24/7 live chat with masters and doctoral level mental health practitioners who are qualified in critical incident response services. Worldwide humanitarian and disaster relief organizations, as well as employers, now benefit from the personalized online assessments, structured multimedia programs, and live expert coaching supported by this web application.

### The Importance of Technology

1. enhanced security mechanisms were of utmost importance in convincing effected employees that they could rely on the confidentiality of the system for their most sensitive information from the assessment scores to personalized recommendations to online chat with CCN experts (custom JAAS plug-in, adaptive password rules, live authentication to employer/insurance eligibility systems, etc); system is fully HIPAA compliant as required for online health care applications



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2. The Macromedia Flex development environment allowed for the rapid prototyping and deployment of a multimedia-rich, cinematic user experience that holds the users attention and interest at a time of heightened stress and distraction; the multimedia content, especially the structured elearning programs are highly video intensive. Using Flash 8 as the client-side delivery mechanism facilitated widespread deployment, firewall traversal, and near universal compatibility.
3. the application is entirely driven by web services, permitting dynamic changes in content and presentation based on user interaction; personalization, which persists from session to session can also be driven by language, employer preferences/requirements, and assessment results
4. RSS feeds were deployed both to disseminate multimedia content during the crisis (updates during and post Katrina in this case) and to import content from other sources
5. real-time connections to live crisis response experts in the CCN call center (as well as remote locations) enabled via XMPP; experts have access to the client's history, can search the knowledgebase for appropriate content, which can be pushed to the user; specialists can also enable co-browsing capabilities to guide a user through an assessment or any other aspect of CrisisCoach

### Originality

1. web-based deployment for 24 x 7 access to crisis management and recovery resources (facilitating crisis preparation, near ubiquitous access during a critical incident, and long-term follow-up afterwards)
2. flash-based, video-centric user experience to help focus users during stressful events
3. real-time access to credentialed (masters level, licensed) crisis response specialists
4. comprehensive assessments drive a content prescription tailored to the particular needs and mental health status of each individual user, and track improvements throughout their recovery and return to productivity
5. a series of video-rich elearning programs, based on the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy, provide in-depth assessment, education, and exercises designed to address depression, anxiety, stress, and substance abuse for those most serious impacted by the crisis/disaster

CrisisCoach is the first (and so far only) application in the behavioral health field that:

- 1) uses a rich multimedia interface (RIA) distributed via the web
- 2) uses interactive assessments to drive a personalized content prescription
- 3) is entirely web-services based
- 4) uses a searchable content knowledgebase
- 5) was built using open standards (J2EE, XMPP, RSS, etc)
- 6) connects users with live, credentialed crisis experts in real time

### Success

While CrisisCoach provided the US Army Corps (USACE) with online access to critical incident response resources, it also extended the reach of our onsite critical incident response specialists who were deployed to the Corps bases and provided them with the resources to do their jobs. After deploying three mobile crisis response RVs to the bases, we completed the beta version of CrisisCoach, installed links to it on laptops with Verizon network cards and shipped the laptops to our team in New Orleans. Once our specialists became familiar with the applica-



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tion, we then developed a campaign to distribute information about the application and designed and produced collateral, including wallet cards, explaining how to access the application. CrisisCoach provided USACE with a highly visible, technology-based means to communicate care, support and commitment to to their personnel.

Upon completion of the 6 month period of service delivery, Major Hibner of the US Army Corps of Engineers stated, "You guys delivered exactly what Colonel Wagonaar was looking for and the service was superior!" Marleen Billot, a USACE-assigned critical incident response specialist using CrisisCoach on the USACE deployment reported, "CrisisCoach allows a person to express themselves and get everything out before the (crisis) coach responds. This allows for more open-ended probing and in turn for continuous sharing on the part of the individual in crisis." USACE-assigned critical incident specialist Barb Powers reported, CrisisCoach is "very simple to maneuver around", and enables people to "speak with someone immediately, this is very important during a time of crisis...". USACE-assigned critical incident response specialist Gary Eldridge reported, "The immediate accessibility and how easy it is are great aspects."

Many of the organizations we serve are already using web based applications for other services and seem to immediately appreciate how this aids individual and organizational recovery.

### Difficulty

The challenges we faced in launching CrisisCoach included constant communication and coordination of build efforts across various technical partners, helping our sales and marketing team transition from representing a service to a highly technology-dependent product/service, and anticipating the customers' needs and pricing sensitivities.

On the technology side -- we were challenged by the "bleeding edge" nature of the technologies chosen (esp. flex/flash) and the necessity of outsourcing where we did not have internal competencies (esp. in the area of web services development).

Service and innovation is at the heart of Crisis Care Network, and while this makes for a winning combination we at times experience organizational tension when service delivery is slowed by technology dependencies that are often least understood (or appreciated) by those we depend on to represent the product (application) in the marketplace.

Crisis Care Network was the first to successfully develop a nationwide, 911-like critical incident response service for employers, and within a few months of responding to the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001, CCN was innovating again, this time using asp programming to develop a web application supporting real-time communication and reporting between all parties involved in critical incident response.

While CCN, its customers and the employees we serve have all benefitted from these pioneering efforts in applying technology to critical incident response it has required constant internal communication, education, management of expectations and team-building.