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Connecting Communities in Crisis:
How ITDRC and Mission Telecom Bridge the Gap When Disaster Strikes

Problem: In natural disasters, communities can lose connectivity, impeding relief efforts and more. The Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC) provides emergency communications and connectivity solutions to bridge this gap. However, as a nonprofit relying on volunteer resources and tech community support, ITDRC faces challenges in scaling its impact and ensuring that connectivity is available when and where it is needed.

Solution: Partnering with Mission Telecom, a nonprofit telecommunications service provider, allows ITDRC to offer affordable, reliable, and flexible connectivity in calamity-stricken areas.

When disasters strike, communities often experience widespread disruption to telecommunications infrastructure. These disruptions place barriers to recovery efforts by preventing first responders, community organizations, and survivors from accessing essential services. Since 2008, the Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC) has helped eliminate these connectivity gaps by providing reliable, temporary access to technology.

With less than 10 full-time employees and a network of 5,000 volunteers, ITDRC distributes the essential

> *Less than two hours after we requested additional services during Hurricane Helene, Mission Telecom … had us up online and running.”*
>
> **– Chris Hillis**
> Co-founder, ITDRC

Quick Facts

- Mission Telecom's customized pricing model allows ITDRC to budget effectively and provide connectivity solutions without financial uncertainty

- The partnership between ITDRC and Mission Telecom has yielded significant results for disaster response and community recovery

- Mission Telecom's premium, unlimited rate plan and ability to activate it within minutes allows ITDRC to respond with urgency when time is of the essence

technology to relief organizations, community centers, and local businesses. "We're a 'lending library' of assets to be given or loaned to affected communities during recovery," says Chris Hillis, co-founder of ITDRC. "That includes mobile hotspots, laptops, or—as I like to say—anything with an on-off switch."

ITDRC's charter comes with several challenges, including scalability, financial constraints, and working in high-stress situations.

> " *Mission Telecom understands our mission and we feel like we have a good partnership with them.*"
>
> **– Chris Hillis**
> Co-founder, ITDRC

Recently, these challenges were put to the limit with large-scale disasters like Hurricanes Helene and Milton. During these events, ITDRC needed immediate access to additional connectivity services to support a growing number of sites, including shelters, distribution points, and recovery centers.

Finding the Right Partner

In early 2024, Mission Telecom reached out to ITDRC and offered to support connectivity efforts. Mission Telecom, also a nonprofit, specializes in providing affordable telecommunications services to organizations serving the public good. Its mission aligns closely with ITDRC's, and the two entities share an understanding of the constraints and needs specific to nonprofit disaster-response efforts.

"It was important to us that Mission Telecom is a nonprofit," says Joe Hillis, operations director of ITDRC and Chris's father. "Our organizations have a lot of commonalities."

Mission Telecom's customized pricing model allows ITDRC to budget effectively and provide connectivity solutions without financial uncertainty. This arrangement ensures that ITDRC can deploy services at scale without unexpected cost increases, which is crucial for a nonprofit with limited funding sources.

During Hurricane Helene, ITDRC faced an unexpected increase in demand for connectivity. Mission Telecom quickly provided additional SIM cards and activated new lines in less than two hours. This responsiveness enabled ITDRC to meet the heightened demand without interruption, maintaining connectivity for survivors and relief workers alike.

> " *Mission Telecom is a terrific partner. Whether we're talking about strategy or support, they are super responsive whenever we need them.*"
>
> **– Joe Hillis**
> Operations Director, ITDRC

Short- and Long-Term Impact

The partnership between ITDRC and Mission Telecom has yielded significant results for disaster response and community recovery. With Mission Telecom's support, ITDRC has been able to serve more locations across multiple states, including hundreds of sites impacted by recent hurricanes.

> " *It's important to us to work with a non-governmental organization that understands our constraints and pain points, and Mission Telecom is a great example of that."*
>
> **– Joe Hillis**
> Operations Director, ITDRC

In addition to supporting emergency response, connectivity provided by ITDRC and Mission Telecom allows hotels, cafés, and other local companies to accept credit-card transactions, order supplies, and communicate, contributing to faster economic recovery for the affected regions.

As ITDRC identifies new needs, Mission Telecom has demonstrated a commitment to evolving alongside them. This flexibility is critical in the unpredictable world of disaster recovery, ensuring that ITDRC can meet the demands of each unique situation.

To the Future

By providing equipment and connectivity free of charge, ITDRC, with Mission Telecom's support, ensures that technology is not a barrier to recovery. Whether it's for filing FEMA claims, coordinating with relief organizations, or supporting community gatherings, ITDRC's connectivity services are accessible to all.

"This partnership highlights the power of mission-driven collaboration and underscores the importance of having adaptable, reliable partners in disaster-relief efforts," says Joe Hillis. "As both organizations continue to work together, our commitment to public service, flexibility, and community-focused solutions serves as a powerful example of how technology can play a crucial role in disaster resilience and recovery."

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info@missiontelecom.org

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About
Mission Telecom

Mission Telecom is a nonprofit investing in a movement of systemic change. It directly serves social, racial, and economic justice by focusing on grantmaking and delivering affordable, reliable wireless broadband and connected devices to schools, libraries, and under-resourced nonprofits.