



DISASTER RESPONSE

**PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED:
OOREDOO RESPONDS TO A WATER
CRISIS IN THE MALDIVES**

JULY 2015

Ooredoo Maldives

Ooredoo Maldives, established in 2005 has a 46% share of the market. It is an operating company of Ooredoo Group, which operates in 14 countries and has a subscriber base of over 111 million.

The Maldives

The Maldives is a tropical nation in the Indian Ocean composed of 26 coral atolls which are made up of hundreds of islands. A population of over 340,000 is spread across these islands, although some remain unpopulated. The main population centre is the capital Malé, which is home to over 150,000 people. The remote island capital is approximately 370 miles south-west of India and 470 miles south-west of Sri Lanka.

Introduction

On the 4th of December 2014, a fire broke out at the Maldives Water and Sewerage Company Generator Unit located on the island capital Malé resulting in the cutting off of drinking water to over 150,000 people.

Whilst government bodies acted quickly to distribute bottled water, supplies were limited and stocks quickly dwindled. With a critical water shortage affecting a third of the nation's population, a State of Emergency was declared by the Government of the Maldives.

As the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) began to work to distribute available water in Malé, water shipments were dispatched from China, India and Sri Lanka, as well as via Sri Lanka Airlines. With long travel times by sea, only a limited supply viable by air, and distribution challenges once in the Maldives, it was estimated that the population would struggle to access safe drinking water for the following week. Key services such as hospitals were also put at high risk.

Ooredoo Maldives Response – First phase

As news of the crisis broke, the business continuity management (BCM) team within Ooredoo Maldives met. Given that a critical utility had suffered a major outage and a national crisis had been declared by the government, the group followed BCM protocol and the internal disaster response business continuity plan was activated.

Business Continuity Team

This team is made up of 14 key members of staff from key business functions within Ooredoo Maldives. Once the team is activated, an operations room is established and together these heads of department form an internal committee which decides on the steps which need to be taken. Once a plan has been established, this is approved by the CEO.

Key Business Functions: Executive Management, Human Resources & Administration, Marketing Communications, Sales and Distribution, Planning, Network Operations & Customer Care.

The first stage of the internal response was to send an email to all staff explaining the situation and putting out a call for volunteers. Prior to the water crisis a number of staff had registered for community focused volunteer work, and so these staff were also contacted by SMS to ask if they would be willing to assist once more. Once activated, volunteers were able to use a pre-existing short code to get information about volunteer activities and the wider response. Over 100 staff members, themselves also affected by the crisis, volunteered to assist in the distribution of available water stocks.

The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) was responsible for leading the response efforts. Ooredoo Maldives was one of the first corporate organisations to reach out to offer partnership and support to the Forces. Ooredoo's volunteers mobilised the necessary human resource to more effectively distribute water supplies.

Ooredoo Group head office in Doha, was one of the first major international corporations to respond to the crisis and donated USD 75,000 to the Malé Water Crisis Management Fund.

Partnership with Maldives National Defence Forces (MNDF)

Whilst no formal partnership agreement existed between the MNDF and Ooredoo, the defence forces are Ooredoo Maldives biggest corporate customer. As such there was an existing relationship through which the Ooredoo team was able to offer support. Many within Ooredoo Maldives management team have experience in strategic planning and military operations. This lends itself both to disaster management, and helped facilitate interaction with the MNDF for this response. Of the 100 staff volunteers approximately 20 were allocated to support the Red Crescent in their response activities which included supporting those waiting at water collection points, and approximately 80 staff supported the MNDF distribution operation.



Figure 1: Ooredoo Maldives staff volunteer at a water distribution point

SMS Short Code

With the sudden onset of the crisis, the nature of which hadn't before been experienced by many in the Maldives, a lack of information and clarity risked contributing to rumour and concern among the impacted population. On the second day of the crisis, a secondary action undertaken by the operator was to utilise both subscriber SMS and corporate social media accounts to share information and to attempt to reduce panic.

An existing SMS short code, traditionally used to for subscribers to find out information about new services, was repurposed to become a Water Crisis Helpline. The number (4567) and its purpose were advertised through social media channels and the calls were routed to Maldives Water & Sewerage Company, where agents were able to provide information about the crisis. An SMS fundraising number was also established allowing Ooredoo subscribers to donate to the response activities.

The re-purposing of an existing short-code was a decision made during the initial response. As a result of its successful use, Ooredoo Maldives intend to keep this short-code on standby to be activated as an emergency hotline in future events.

Ooredoo Maldives Response – Second phase

As bottled water arrived on the island it was distributed by truck. Demand far exceeded supply, and much of the population had to spend long periods of time queuing and waiting for water trucks to arrive, with no guarantee they would come. The sporadic and unpredictable nature of the service put additional stress on the population and there were concerns that this could lead to rising tension and unrest.

During a visit to the National Operations centre for the crisis, the Ooredoo Maldives team discussed the ways in which communications could add value to the response. The need for up to date location based information for the water distributions was identified as a key requirement.

To address this challenge, the second phase of the Ooredoo Maldives response to the crisis was launched, combining its M2M service 'Locate' with cell broadcast and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to communicate information about the location of the water trucks. Firstly, maps of the water drop off points as well as information on the expected timetables were shared via SMS, IVR and social media. This information was further improved with the installation of the 'Locate' system within each water truck cabin. Real time information could then be gathered on the trucks location and shared via live map, made freely available to members of the public. This meant that rather than wait unnecessarily, people were provided with greater situational awareness enabling them to access a more

Locate System

Ooredoo Locate is designed for small end-users, large companies and government agencies to track their operating vehicles and equipment to improve the overall efficiency of the organization.

Ooredoo Locate is a real time GPS tracking system which shows the whereabouts of the vehicle on the maps, for instance, Google Map, easing up the deployment of vehicles. With real-time vehicle tracking software, the user can re-route a driver to a new call in the same area saving time and money.

predictable service. Instant updates were also shared via social media channels.

The swift adaptation of the existing Ooredoo Maldives Locate system for this crisis response purpose demonstrates how the operator was able to leverage its existing strengths to benefit affected populations in times of crisis. The Locate system will now be a tool for future deployment in crises if required, and already there have been requests for the system to be installed on sea ambulances - the speedboat ambulances that service the islands.

A further response was for the Ooredoo team to support NGOs through providing access to free coding as well as hosting applications on a single, built-for purpose platform. App developers who were designing applications about water collection points were provided with the data from the Locate system allowing them to track the water trucks. Data connectivity was also provided by Ooredoo Maldives to the central operations room from where the response to the crisis was being coordinated.

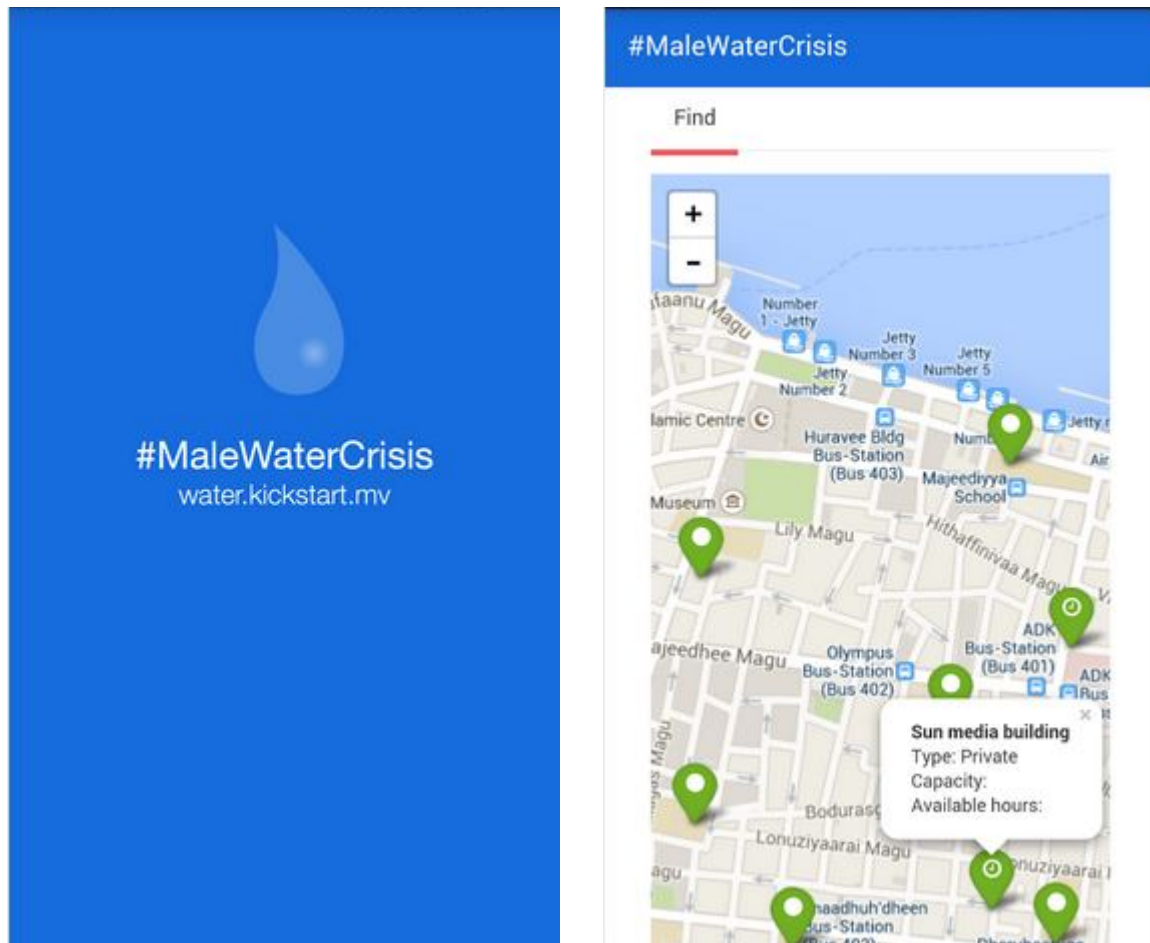


Figure 2: An example of a 'Water Crisis' app developed using the Ooredoo 'Locate' data

Preparedness paid off

The ability of Ooredoo Maldives to act so decisively was in part due to the fact that 8 months before the crisis, their Business Continuity Management team had proactively created a framework plan for action to be activated under the declaration of a national crisis. When this plan was then implemented each member of staff involved understood the role they had to play. This crisis was the first time that the team was fully activated.

Disasters and crisis, by their nature, can be highly unpredictable. Planning to be prepared for the unexpected is therefore an on-going but necessary challenge. Robust yet flexible business continuity plans are key to withstanding and responding to the impacts of disaster and crisis, both on the network itself and on the communities in which MNOs operate.

Good pre-existing relationships with both the government, MNDF and NGOs operating in the country meant that coordination could be swift and decisions made based upon existing trust and mutual understanding. The MNDF was

Preparing for the Unexpected; Ooredoo responds to a Water Crisis in the Maldives

already an existing customer and so Ooredoo was well placed to offer additional support when required. Within such a relatively small society, many of those in the NGO space are well connected.

Ooredoo management attribute the positive impact they were able to have to the internal culture of the organisation, with a focus on the employee satisfaction. Employees and their families were provided with supplies of mineral water during the crisis to enable them to continue both their work and voluntary service without needing to queue themselves.

As well as positively contributing to the response efforts, Ooredoo Maldives saw its brand value increase by 17 points. With a very visible volunteer network, and innovative use of services the operator experienced positive feedback in both the media and on social media. The Ooredoo Maldives team also received a letter of thanks from the President of the Maldives for the work they had undertaken during the crisis.



Figure 3: Examples of the customer facing messages shared on social media

Key challenges/ lessons learnt

Whilst the response to the crisis was seen as very positive and efficient, there are learnings that Ooredoo Maldives have taken from the event. The Business Continuity and Disaster Management team have analysed both their processes and structure. For example it has been recognised that more involvement is required from the IT department, to ensure that actions have internal technical support they require. It has also been acknowledged that the crisis management plan relies on the personal capability of staff in certain positions and that translating the process on paper into real life situations can highlight challenges not previously identified. The Ooredoo Maldives team believe that better communications between stakeholders, such as the Chief of Defence, the NGOs and media groups, as well as internally could result in even faster or more effective outreach in future events. Faster communications between Ooredoo Maldives and Ooredoo Group would ensure that all actions had the support of group and could also highlight areas where Group or other OPCOs could assist.

A quarterly review of the business continuity management plan will be conducted going forward, with greater involvement from the Ooredoo Maldives Chairman in future events, enabling a proactive approach to be taken. The team want to ask both where they can use their technical expertise and infrastructure to support a response and where they can use their human resources and position as a trusted brand.

In future events Ooredoo has suggested that the Mobile Networks as key communications providers should be included in the national emergency committee meetings. This, as well as greater collaboration in the planning phases, is something advocated by the GSMA. It is also recommended that all responding agencies, including the MNOs, participate in disaster simulation exercises to increase preparedness and define ahead of time the roles of each participating agency.

Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

In March 2015, Ooredoo Group became one of the founding signatories of the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter. The Charter, an initiative launched by the GSMA Disaster Response programme, is a set of principals aimed at the mobile industry and focused on maintaining access to connectivity and communications for affected populations in times of crisis. The initial signatories of the Charter collectively represent over one billion subscribers in 35 countries.

Whilst the activities of Ooredoo Maldives took place before the signing of the Charter, this response acts as an example of the type of initiative signatories aim to undertake, in line with the Charter principals of supporting those affected by crisis and disaster through access to communication and information.

More information on the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter can be found at:

www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/disaster-response

Conclusions

Ooredoo Maldives played an important role in the water shortage crisis, above and beyond that of providing communication services. Other than some minor impact to the network caused by congestion, this crisis posed little risk to the continuation of the operator's core business. Whilst this was the case, an understanding of the potential supportive role the network could play in the response led Ooredoo Maldives to take actions despite the lack of obvious business incentive. Many in the Maldives were surprised to find Ooredoo at the forefront of response, especially in providing Corporate Social Responsibility and crisis support above technological solutions. Whilst the operator approached the crisis from a humanitarian point of view Ooredoo Maldives have seen this role shift the perception of the brand within the country, with the human values of Ooredoo Group recognised, and strengthening its position as a brand that cares and is there for the community in times of crisis. The willingness of Ooredoo employees to volunteer has also had a positive impact internally, continuing to strengthen the culture of community and social responsibility and at the same time highlighting that Ooredoo is a part of the community in which it operates.

About the GSMA

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting nearly 800 operators with more than 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress, Mobile World Congress Shanghai, and the Mobile 360 Series conferences.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at www.gsma.com. Follow the GSMA on Twitter: @GSMA

Mobile for Development

Mobile for Development brings together our mobile operator members, the wider mobile industry and the development community to drive commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets. We identify opportunities for social, economic impact and stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services.

GSMA Disaster Response Programme

The Disaster Response programme works with mobile operators to determine how they can most effectively support each other and improve preparedness and resilience among mobile networks in disasters. The Disaster Response programme does this primarily through the 'Humanitarian Connectivity Charter'. The Charter represents a set of shared principals adopted by key players in the mobile industry to support improved access to communication and information for those affected by crisis in order to reduce the loss of life and to positively contribute to humanitarian response.

The Disaster Response programme also works with humanitarian organisations, governments, NGOs and the broader mobile ecosystem on a national, regional and global basis to drive the creation and adoption of coordinated, impactful solutions and practices that leverage the ubiquity of mobile technology.

Contact

For more information on the GSMA Disaster Response Programme, please contact us on disasterresponse@gsma.com or visit: <http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/disaster-response>