

## **Efforts Afoot to Coordinate IT Volunteer Work After Disasters**

*Many tech needs yet to be addressed*

By MELISSA SOLOMON  
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After recovering from the shock of Sept. 11, Julie Gandle decided to do her part to aid the recovery efforts. She told a Park Avenue emergency relief center volunteer that she had 18 computers and two weeks of man-hours to donate from her New York-based IT infrastructure support firm, Work Friendly Solutions. "The poor woman looked at me and said she didn't even know how to use a computer," said Gandle.

As the devastation of Sept. 11 unfolded, IT professionals worldwide recognized the data and infrastructure implications and stepped forward to offer their expertise. But while relief agencies were ready with food, shelter and counseling services, no one seemed to be prepared to harness the collective IT manpower and put it to systematic use.

"You would think in New York City 2001 that there's a whole portable unit that can drop down in two hours with PalmPilots. That doesn't happen," Gandle said.

Within weeks, a few groups emerged to lead the business and IT recovery efforts. With help from thousands of volunteers like Gandle, they accomplished a great deal. But six months later, many feel that much more could have been done. So IT and business leaders are now streamlining their efforts to tackle long-term needs and ensure that they're never caught off-guard again.

It was chaos," said Maria Gotsch, director of Restart Central, an organization jointly operated by the New York City Partnership and the city and state economic development offices to channel donated goods and services to businesses affected by the attacks. "We had every problem, every situation that a start-up has."

John Williamson, a laid-off IT worker, said he tried unsuccessfully to volunteer. "We should have had some direction, some leadership," said Williamson, who created one of many Web sites compiling volunteer opportunities. "But when you tried to step up to the plate, you got pushed aside. It seemed politics stepped into it pretty quickly."

Relief coordinators said the volume of assistance was heartening, but the offers of help far exceeded the demand. And in the first few months after Sept. 11, their attention was focused on helping those with emergency needs.

But "there are still needs," said Barbara Chang, executive director of NPower NY, a nonprofit organization that provides IT assistance to other nonprofits in the city.

A February update to a study commissioned by the New York City Partnership in November found that the economic impact from the attacks is meeting initial projections of \$83 billion in damage to the city's economy.

Many businesses are starting to move into permanent office space, build up their long-term infrastructures and apply for grants and loans, said Ronna Brown, president of The Better Business Bureau of New York, which held forums in

November and January to coordinate relief efforts.

To address long-term planning, Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space, has been working to create a national emergency technology guard. His plan is to form a chain of command to coordinate the science and technology sectors to prevent and respond to disasters.

"There was such an outpouring of support," said Wyden's press secretary, Carol Guthrie. "Even more might have been accomplished if there was a clear organization in place."

Businesses affected by the attacks or those who would like to volunteer or donate equipment to businesses in need can complete an NPower NY relief form at [www.npowerny.org/Index\\_re.html](http://www.npowerny.org/Index_re.html) or contact Restart Central at (866) 227-0458 or [www.restartcentral.org](http://www.restartcentral.org).