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## REAL ROI

CLOSE

### System of an Up

*A nonprofit agency is outfitted with a more reliable network, enabling staffers and volunteers to stay connected in any location*

by [Coreen Bailor](#)

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Relief International (RI) is a Los Angeles nonprofit agency dedicated to providing emergency relief, rehabilitation, and development assistance worldwide. It has more than a dozen offices in locations like Afghanistan, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Niger, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Pakistan, the Palestinian Territories, and the United Kingdom. RI's staff members and volunteers often travel to locations far from L.A. as part of the agency's relief operations, which makes communicating and exchanging information electronically and remotely accessing their desktops while they are in the field mandatory.

RI's email and information-sharing system had, however, been unreliable and inflexible. "We had a couple of situations with our previous provider where the system went down without notice because the provider had maintenance scheduled--that wouldn't work for us," says Farshad Rastegar, CEO. "The provider would perform maintenance and think if it's at 4 a.m., it's okay--we have global operations connected to the same system, so we just can't afford to have it go down, for even five minutes." Relief came from on-demand IT software provider Info-Street and its flagship solution, Street-Smart. The agency went live with StreetSmart in September 2005.

Key capabilities of StreetSmart that RI uses include address book, application sharing, calendar, email, file sharing, instant messaging, knowledge base, mailing lists, PDA sync, Web-site publishing and hosting, and workflow functionality, according to Siamak Farah, CEO of InfoStreet. The cost of RI's StreetSmart installation was \$32,500 (costs for RI's alternatives to StreetSmart tallied \$145,000), resulting in total first-year savings of \$112,500. But it's the soft benefits that are even more compelling. The agency can stay connected with its two sets of customers: donors and staff members and volunteers. RI can send urgent disaster relief appeals via email to its donor base of about 25,000 people and send donors reports in response to donations they've made to programs. As for staffers and volunteers, "the ability to have this reliable communication network that doesn't go down, and being sure that the information you send is actually getting to the other end, that's critical," Rastegar says.

The new network also helps staffers and volunteers ensure that no data will be lost while in the field. "Often, RI employees have had their laptops confiscated by corrupt customs officials or have had them lost to other hazards of Third World travel," Farah says. "Without InfoStreet, losing a laptop would've meant losing all work and contacts and connection to the RI network of data and communications." But with Street-Smart, according to Farah, RI's workforce can use any computer with a Web browser and Internet connection to connect back to the home office and access important information like files, contacts, and calendars.

Rastegar is well aware of how important data backup is: Prior to RI's StreetSmart implementation his laptop crashed. He lost a year's worth of data on his hard drive. "But now all the data that is transmitted through InfoStreet is backed up, so there's absolutely no way that we would lose any data," he says. "In that one year of data that I lost, there were tons and tons of important information that was lost forever. We're very comfortable that that will never happen again."

### The Payoff

As a result of launching InfoStreet's StreetSmart solution, RI:

- reaped first-year savings of \$112,500;
- has a way to let staffers and volunteers access their desktop from anywhere in the world;
- can effectively communicate with and report back to its donor base; and
- can focus less on IT and more on saving lives.

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