



Emergency communications isn't just for first responders

When a disaster like Hurricane Maria strikes, it's only natural that much of what the media initially presents, what we all think about, is the immediate devastation—footage of homes swept away, cars overturned, the destructive force of nature in full view. Then, in the ensuing days, the focus shifts to rescue efforts and how much aid is arriving, how many people are on the ground to help.

But a lesser known type of aid was rendered through the partnership of Focused Mission, Viasat and Ligado Networks. With just a small group of people on the ground in Puerto Rico—Focused Mission's four-person disaster response team—commerce was able to proceed in spite of all the problems encountered restoring full power to the island.

It began with communication between relief agencies, both governmental and NGOs, through some immediate push-to-talk (PTT) implementation, but expanded to include the enablement of IoT applications.

"We were able to provide mobile satellite service through Viasat's equipment and service platform operating over the Ligado satellite network in the hurricane affected region," said David Craig, Senior Mission Advisor, Focused Mission. "While providing PTT was necessary, we also required secure IP data service capability provided by Viasat's uniquely positioned platform."

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DAVID CRAIG
Senior Mission Advisor
Focused Mission



This ability to connect people and merchants through both voice or data communications to get goods flowing again through normal, rather than emergency, channels was critical. One of the primary methods for providing aid to the people of Puerto Rico is through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. EBT cards allow state governments to provide and track benefits to authorized recipients and are processed like credit/debit cards. Following Hurricane Maria, merchants lacked sufficient network connectivity to process purchases with EBT cards. So even though the goods, including food and other essential supplies, may have been available, there was no way to process transactions. The local economy was also hampered as local stores could not sell available goods.

"David's team was able to securely integrate terminals with credit card readers," said Buddy Carman, Director, North America Region, Mobile Satellite Services of Viasat. "We knew FEMA and the Department of Agriculture were depositing funds into accounts of residents, but without connectivity, no transactions were taking place."

The upshot has been \$3 million worth of commerce processed through the communication services provided by Focused Mission, Viasat and Ligado. Even today, many stores are continuing to use this critical communications service.



“I have been responding to disasters most of my adult life,” said David, “and I always tell people in the path of a hurricane to have a couple of hundred dollars in cash on hand if you can. But, with Maria, thousands would have been closer to the truth. Without Ligado and Viasat, we’d have been in the dark.”

Thanks to innovative partners like Focused Mission, Viasat’s secure, rugged, resilient technology, and Ligado’s reliable satellite coverage, disaster recovery has been accelerated for the people of Puerto Rico. The technology can be expanded to include connecting ATMs, electric grid substation monitoring, and other vital services as hurricane-vulnerable areas prepare for another season.



Making connections is Ligado’s core mission. Our vision is to modernize American infrastructure by connecting the Industrial Internet of Things. With our current state-of-the-art satellite technology and plans to deploy Custom Private Networks for the businesses that keep this country running, we’re paving the way for future innovations.



Viasat is on a mission to connect the world. As a global broadband services and technology company, Viasat ensures consumers, businesses, governments and military personnel have communications access - anywhere - whether on the ground, at sea, or in-flight.



Focused Mission provides Mission Critical Solutions that meet the Mission Critical Requirements of our Customers. Our Guiding Principles & Core Values: Teamwork, Servant Leadership, Accountability and Communication. We pride ourselves on providing innovative technology solutions to solve our clients’ most complex problems. The Focused Mission team has over 100+ years of combined experience with a specialty of responding to emergencies and disasters worldwide to deploy state of the art technologies while working in austere environments.

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