

Learning Grassroots Logistics

Assessing private sector activism, social entrepreneurship in CSR operations, and ad-hoc logistics in the case of Aramex's relief campaign "Deliver Hope to Gaza".

Themes

- Humanitarian relief activity
- Volunteer recruitment
- Ad-hoc logistics
- Social media
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Management of public expectations
- Social entrepreneurship
- Private sector activism

Those concerned with the organization and execution of relief campaigns related to current events will need to be ready to encounter several challenges – in particular the timely recruitment and motivation of volunteers and employees, the definition of roles and responsibilities, and the leverage of stakeholder expectation. All of these will have to be managed effectively if a relief operation is to succeed.

This White Paper seeks to share the lessons that emerged during Aramex's "Deliver Hope to Gaza" campaign, which began as a response to the humanitarian crisis in the territory during and after the Israeli assault in December 2008 and January 2009.

This document outlines:

- How to engage in a relief campaign as a corporation
- How to connect the campaign to a company's brand
- How to engage key stakeholders (employees, donors, NGOs, private and public sector partners, the media, and social media community)
- How to leverage communication through different channels
- How to create publicity for the campaign
- How to recruit, retain and motivate volunteers

The Case: What was "Deliver Hope to Gaza"?

The background to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza in December 2008 and the decision to respond to the massive public response to it.

"Deliver Hope to Gaza" at a glance

Total donations delivered 600 tons No. of participating volunteers 200 on average per day, approx. 1,500 total 60 (with 300 also volunteering) No. of Aramex employees involved 60 (90 days to final delivery) No. of campaign days 65 truckloads (40 feet trailers) No. of trailers transported

encouraging people to donate unbelievable fashion from the very first day. We were expecting loading 12."

Raji Hattar Chief Sustainability Officer,

The beginning

Under the banner "Deliver Hope to Gaza", Aramex and its partners in Jordan and the UAE established a humanitarian relief campaign to alleviate the suffering of the people in Gaza during and after the Israeli assault in late December 2008 and early January 2009. It was finalized on December 30th, 2008, just three days after the first strikes, and was launched publicly on December 31st, 2008. The campaign spanned a total of two months.

Organic growth

Although very much in tune with Aramex's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, the prominence of the Palestinian cause and the massive public response to the assault enabled "Deliver Hope to Gaza" to evolve organically in both Jordan and the UAE. Aramex harnessed the overwhelming public sympathy through an initiative in which concerned individuals and groups were specifically integrated into the operation – from blogs and social networking sites that helped generate the massive volume of donations, to the volunteers who collected, sorted and packed them, often assuming roles as process managers and campaign advocates.

The end result

Under the official endorsement of the Red Crescent, and as part of the Convoy of the Hashemite Charity Organization, over 600 tons of goods were delivered to Gaza. Faced with an unfolding humanitarian tragedy, one with a deep emotional impact in Jordan and the UAE, Aramex displayed the power of private sector activism.

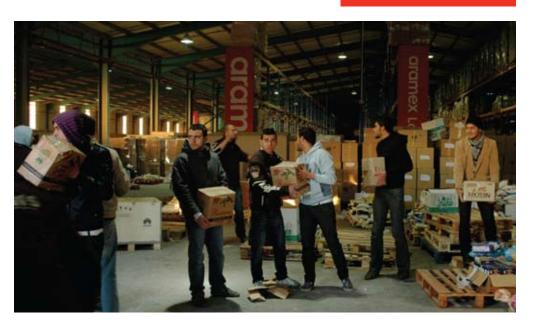
Instead of waiting for official bodies to create frameworks for public participation, Aramex took the initiative to respond instantaneously with a regional relief campaign. The success of the campaign in the multicultural society of Dubai, where volunteers were drawn from all communities and backgrounds, was a clear endorsement of Aramex's strategic approach to the "Deliver Hope to Gaza" campaign.

The Communication Strategy

The importance of developing an overall brand message for the campaign that is consistent with Aramex's corporate values and existing business functions.

"People started adopting the 'Deliver Hope to Gaza' initiative. telling other people about it in a number of ways - even by SMS. One post on 7iber, for instance, until the whole Jordanian online community knew about it."

Naseem Tarawneh Black Iris Blog



Challenges

- Avoiding perceptions that Aramex is exploiting the situation to promote its own corporate image.
- Providing explanations why Aramex is involved in this campaign and how the activities connect to its corporate values.
- Communicating the campaign goals that connect to the target audience.

Analysis & Solutions

Developing the message

The chosen message of the campaign, "Deliver Hope to Gaza", was positive, emphasizing hope and focusing on the humanitarian – as opposed to the political – dimension of the Palestinian cause. As a result, it attracted a broad cross-section of the population, including a high number of expatriates living in Jordan and the UAE. The "Deliver Hope to Gaza" theme contributed significantly to the success of the campaign and the enrichment of the community's interaction with it.

Articulating Aramex's role

Aramex was careful to always define its role as catalyst and facilitator of the aid collection and delivery, countering possible insinuations that Aramex was exploiting the situation for its corporate image. This was underlined by the use of the word "deliver", which clarified Aramex's role as an enabler, and one that is consistent with its existing brand.

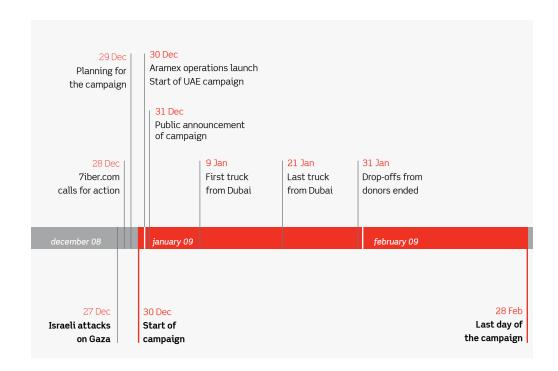
Integrating the campaign into Aramex's corporate values

Aramex's involvement in "Deliver Hope to Gaza" was driven by its core values of corporate activism, versatility, and its reliance on a network of dedicated people. Building on the experience gained from its relief campaign in Lebanon during the 2006 war, Aramex's response to the unfolding tragedy in Gaza was swift, beginning on December 31st, just three days after the initial Israeli

The Communication Strategy

Campaign roll-out

"Deliver Hope to Gaza" timeline



assault. By empowering volunteers, Aramex was able to generate a unique collaborative spirit that in turn created a network of campaign advocates in the community.

General Findings

I. Initiative selection

Initiatives should be selected according to a company's existing capabilities and activities. The corporate brand has to create synergies with the campaign itself, so it was logical for Aramex, a logistics service provider, to facilitate the collation and delivery of aid. Service providers should present themselves as catalysts – and manufacturers as donors. Aramex could present itself as an effective facilitator because of a logical connection to its core operation.

II. Message tone

The tone of the message has to resonate with the stakeholders, while keeping any overt corporate affiliations to a minimum. In this way, people personalized the campaign and disseminated the relevant information via peer-to-peer media such as mobile phone text messages. This helped create greater affinity for the campaign's goals.

III. Effective promotion

The activities must be promoted in a consistent and focused fashion. While it may be impossible to control every public discussion of the campaign, repeating the aims and message in a unified manner will instill a higher overall communication consistency.

Publicity and Use of Media

Integrating online media, social networking sites and user-generated publicity into a holistic communication approach – and maximizing reach effectively and efficiently.

spreading the news. They all group on Facebook to receive broadcast them live on air. Online channels like Watwet and Twitter were constantly of volunteers needed."

Razan Khatib Blogger and founder of Spring



Challenges

- Due to the urgency of the situation in Gaza, the relief campaign had to start as quickly as possible to benefit its intended recipients.
- The media channels had to target as wide a sector of the public as possible, while the message in each had to resonate with the specific audience to inspire them to participate.
- New information and updates had to be disseminated through a flexible, easy-to-update media channel that enabled public distribution. The new channel also had to act as a central point of reference.
- The campaign message had to be amended for different media channels in order to raise interest and reach different demographic segments.

Analysis & Solutions

Immediate steps

Once Aramex set up the collection points on December 30th, 2008, a decentralized, flexible communication strategy was established to publicize the campaign's activities. Conventional media channels were utilized at this stage, including a corporate press statement. Aramex published advertisements in major newspapers in Jordan and the UAE, using the English-language-daily 7days in the latter, to generate donations from the large expatriate community.

Focusing on social media networks

Aramex and its partners opted to rely mainly on participatory communication tools such as blogs, social networking platforms, mobile text messaging and word-of-mouth to push the message. Aramex created a Facebook group to serve as a reference point and sent out an e-mail shot to all Aramex employees and a range of bloggers in the Middle East and the Gulf to initiate the viral component. In Jordan, popular blogs such

Publicity and Use of Media

Getting the snowball rolling

How the campaign message spread



as The Black Iris and the social media platform 7iber mentioned Aramex as a support system for the relief activities. The blogs became the main means of raising awareness; while some simply reposted Aramex's flyers, others became champions of the campaign, encouraging people to donate and volunteer, and offering tips on which items were most in need.

Maintaining the momentum

Throughout the campaign, video sharing platforms such as Ikbis and YouTube documented the activities, while microblogging platforms such as Watwet and Twitter offered campaign channels in which subscribers could receive updates and calls-to-action via SMS messages. The spirit was captured by the Arab Media Network Radio stations in Jordan and the UAE, which included calls-to-action in their daily news bulletins, and by other major TV, radio and print media outlets. The coverage helped to validate and accelerate SMS and e-mail circulation between individuals.

General findings

I. Fully integrating the communication approach

Applying a fully integrated communications strategy is crucial for successfully delivering a message to the public. A consistent message across the different media channels will enhance the credibility, affinity and validity of the campaign.

II. Importance of social media

The use of social media helped recruit campaign advocates to champion its goals under their own volition. Individuals felt empowered and sufficiently at ease with the campaign to designate themselves as its spokespeople, a fact underlined by the volume of user-generated content on the web. Online social networks such as Facebook also proved to be ideal reference points throughout the campaign, serving as a centralized source of information and ongoing documentation, much of which was user-generated.

Publicity and Use of Media

"One of the problems we faced was the changing rules and regulations on the type of and regulations were being issued by the Hashemite Charity Organization, they were changing all the time - and people were emotional and simply wanted their donations to be delivered."

Ramsey Tesdell Founder of 7iber.com

Facebook also has the capability to mobilize entire groups through "friends" networks. Younger audiences, such as students and recent graduates, predominantly learned about the campaign online.

III. Empowering volunteers

Volunteers can be important ambassadors of the campaign. A campaign that welcomes and recognizes an individual's contribution will be rewarded with a greater public connection and, as a result, a network of community advocates. For instance, a volunteer even championed the campaign on Dubai TV's Emirates News program.

IV. The limitless reach of SMS

Mobile text messaging remains the most popular means for sharing information among professional people and older audiences. SMS texts also proved to be the most effective means of inspiring calls-to-action, such as harvesting donations and recruiting volunteers. It generated instant responses and quickly spread the message; not only are they quick to write or forward, the receiver is more likely to respond to a friend's recommendation than a corporate mass mailing.

V. Highlight the campaign, not the corporation

Individuals treat corporate initiatives with some skepticism, so it was crucial in all communication that Aramex was perceived purely as a support system. Therefore, all Aramex-supplied material adopted a minimal corporate tone of voice which could be easily appropriated and redistributed by bloggers and social media as their own - which was vital in maintaining the campaign's credibility.

VI. Media access is vital

Media access at the drop-off points and in the warehouse should be prepared in advance. This increased public awareness and also motivated warehouse employees and volunteers. However, care must be taken to ensure that all volunteers consent to being filmed or photographed.

Online response to the campaign	
Members of the Facebook group "Deliver Hope to Gaza"	1,200
No. of blogs & e-zines covering the campaign activities	50
No. of Google search results for "Deliver Hope to Gaza"	3.000

The Operations of the Campaign

Devising and implementing the operational workflow, and accepting the dynamic nature of the campaign and the often unpredictable variables it created.

"We formed two 12-meter lines of pallets. One side had the had empty boxes marked for each required item. There would be 15 volunteers at a time. moving between the two lines separating the items. We had six such lines! Another group of volunteers would take over the packaging process, using packages. It was like a beehive!"

Sulaiman Agel Aramex Senior Operations Supervisor in Amman

Challenges

- Integrating the drop-off points into Aramex's existing network.
- Sorting and packing the donations while enforcing strict quality control.
- Identifying and managing human defects and mistakes, and disseminating the ever-changing regulations issued at the border.
- Balancing the fluctuations of volunteer numbers available for work with the amount of goods needing to be sorted and packed.
- The division of regular items intended for Aramex's customers, and the donated goods intended for the campaign.

Analysis & Solutions

Selecting the drop-off points

In cooperation with mall operators such as Al-Futtaim Group in the UAE and Cozmo supermarket in Amman, Aramex established clearly visible drop-off points at high-traffic sites close to shopping centers. Aramex's collection teams together with volunteers loaded the materials on to Aramex trucks. which then transported them to the warehouses for sorting and packing. In Jordan, it was later decided that Aramex's offices would better serve as drop-off points; not only were they already part of the company's logistics network, but also it reduced the necessity of additional staff supervision and management.

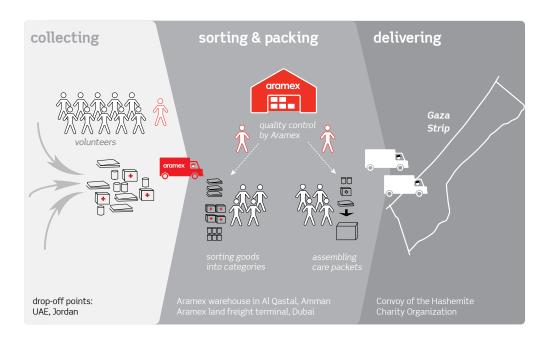
Devising an operational workflow

The operations consisted of three main steps:

- 1. Loading and transporting the donations from the drop-off points to the Aramex warehouse using Aramex's trucks.
- 2. Sorting the goods by categories with the help of volunteers.
- 3. Packing the material into "care packets" containing a specific variety of goods and preparing them for shipping.
- 4. The aid material was compiled, sorted and packed at Aramex facilities.

The Operations of the Campaign

From donations to delivery Campaign operations model



Accepting the variables

Due to the instant and overwhelming response from the public in both the UAE and Jordan, Aramex had to make peace with the decentralized and often unstructured nature of the operations. For instance, at the warehouse in Jordan there was no clear distinction between the sorting and the packing of the items collected, while variables such as the fluctuating volume of donations, the changing regulations concerning the parcels' contents and the variation in volunteer numbers prevented clear process management.

Aramex employees did, however, enforce strict quality control measures, and this was important in reducing errors. That said, with longer preparation time and more staff, operations could have been more efficient.

Focus on the results, not the means

It was important to allow the participants to set their own working practices in the warehouse. Too many rules and regulations, especially with strong implementation from Aramex staff members, would have dampened the collaborative spirit and reduced further participation. It was important to allow the volunteers themselves to control the teams, using their own example as the best form of discipline. Ultimately, as the aid was reaching the required targets, the processes could be bypassed.

Ensure final delivery

With an innovative campaign such as "Deliver Hope to Gaza", which was operating in a region with limited experience of civil society, it was important that the donations collected reached their end target – the people of Gaza. Aramex worked with the Hashemite Charity Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to monitor the final delivery and then communicate the results back to the volunteers and the donors. This helped to reassure the general public that their efforts did in fact contribute to relieving the suffering.

The Operations of the Campaign

"A Korean woman with no knowledge of Gaza went out and bought a mountain of blankets. She said 'I do not know what kind of food Palestinians eat, but they will need these'."

Ahmed Marie

Operations Director of campaign team in Aramex



General findings

I. Embrace grassroots logistics

Accept that the operations cannot always be thoroughly coordinated from a centralized hub, but that volunteer initiatives can adequately and immediately shape their organization.

II. Make peace with uncertainties

Any campaign of such dynamic nature is subject to continuous change. While these must be accepted in order to respond instantaneously to an unfolding crisis, establishing a quality-control unit to supervise the finished work is a crucial step in managing these variables.

III. Consider drop-off point location and access

While high visibility for drop-off points – malls, shopping districts, etc – is important for public recognition, the need for coordination with the facilitator's existing operations also should be considered.

IV. Operational leaders need to be installed

Team leaders from the volunteers can serve as information hubs and reference points, thus increasing the control of the operations and relieving Aramex's employees from this obligation.

Management of Stakeholders

Ascertaining the role of the different interest groups contributing to the campaign – from volunteers to corporate partners – was key to fulfilling each function.

"The idea of using volunteers wasn't actually present at the outset, but when people saw our activity at the Cozmo supermarket in Amman, collecting all of the items from people, they wanted to help – and even started helping to load the trucks, then loading their own cars and following the trucks to the Aramex warehouse! When they started also sorting the items, we realized we could harness this to help the campaign."

Raji Hattar Chief Sustainability Officer, Aramey

Challenges

- Managing the diversity of political, religious and socioeconomic groups
 present within the volunteers and providing an inclusive umbrella under
 which such differences could be overcome.
- Welcoming contributions from partners in the public and private sectors.
- Addressing both Arab citizens and expatriates, specifically in the UAE.
- Instructing new volunteers and integrating them into the operations.
- The efficient dissemination of information relevant to volunteer activities, such as packing and sorting.
- Ensuring the involvement of partners from the private sector and media.
- For Aramex staff, the ability to maintain a balance between regular duties and the additional efforts required for the campaign.

Analysis & Solutions

Opening the umbrella

In the first instance, the umbrella that united the divergent sections of the community was the emotional impact of the situation in Gaza itself. And once the Red Crescent approved the campaign, an additional, official element was provided that offered greater comfort for other participating groups and companies.

Integrating the volunteers

Due to the scale and rapidity of the response from the general public, the integration of volunteers into the process remained flexible throughout the campaign. Recruitment was virtually instantaneous, with separate day- and evening-shifts channeling the flow of volunteers in the UAE.

Utilizing own staff

The role of Aramex employees was crucial, with several divisions working well beyond normal hours to coordinate the processes. To ensure that the employees' workload and their work at the campaign did not interfere with

Management of Stakeholders

"The best part of the campaign was that people could donate items or they could volunteer to assist on the ground - or they could do both. No matter what kind of contribution they made, it was hugely fulfilling. It was truly inspiring that so many people wanted to help and that the donations were still coming in strong well into the campaign."

Widad RaadPalestinian-American living in Dubai

one another, the team either was split into two separate groups, or different work shifts were assigned to cover both regular duties and campaign activities. In the UAE, the facilities were separated, with campaign operations taking place in Aramex's Land Freight terminal and regular business shifted to Aramex's facilities at Jebel Ali.

Identifying social entrepreneurs

Aramex workers helped spread a culture of empowerment throughout the volunteers, and even transferred the role of assigning tasks to them. A network of leaders soon emerged among the volunteers, who took the initiative and managed the workflow amongst the others. These social entrepreneurs also established themselves as a focal point for receiving and relating instructions, providing updates and offering verification on new information or processes. The campaign relied greatly on the volunteers' ability to respond to the ever-changing nature of the crisis.

Incorporating partners

Creating a network of partners from the corporate, NGO and charitable community was crucial. Fitness First gyms, for instance, provided another layer of drop-off points, the New English School in Amman laid on buses three times a day to take the volunteers to the Aramex facility near Queen Alia International Airport, and the Red Crescent approved the whole project, creating additional legitimacy. Aramex also worked with local retailer Pharmacy One to sift through and sort the medical donations.

In the UAE, the private sector was extremely cooperative in spreading the news of the campaign and contributing either via donations, a volunteer workforce, or operational assets – trucks, for instance – to transport the goods. The campaign was inundated with inquiries, from large corporations down to small private schools.

Management of Stakeholders



Encouraging and accommodating diversity

The collaborative spirit in the Aramex warehouse remained welcoming and apolitical throughout, a factor that in itself attracted more volunteers and donors, while motivating Aramex's employees. It was made clear to all volunteers that the campaign activites were solely to collect and distribute aid to the people of Gaza, not a platform for expressing partisan views. This ensured positive, clear and controversy-free media coverage, in turn helping to increase the number of corporations, NGOs and social groups to participate.

General findings

I. Social entrepreneurs can drive campaign activities

Empowering volunteers to display initiative and responsibility is vital when coping with the dynamics of a relief-based campaign. Social entrepreneurs can, if they are able to emotionally invest in the campaign, become an important part of the operations' infrastructure and serve as information hubs, thus removing a campaign's overtly corporate image. So, while corporate employees must be seen as role models and not operation directors, volunteers must feel empowered to take initiative at every stage.

II. The importance of an inclusive atmosphere

A campaign must encourage the widest possible participation. A campaign umbrella must be created that is wide enough to cover all different interest groups, and eliminate skepticism about corporate interests.

III. Emphasise the human element

The human dimension to any campaign is important to stimulate media interest, which will then drive corporate and individual participation.

IV. Understand the stakeholders

Stakeholder requests have to be effectively managed in order to leverage other parties' contributions.

Unanticipated Challenges

Although Aramex and its partners made plans for a number of contingencies, the ever-evolving nature of the campaign meant certain unforeseen challenges inevitably arose.

The sheer scale of the response

It is clear that civil society in the Middle East falls some way short of Western Europe or the United States, with comparatively low levels of volunteerism or civic institutions to deal with non-state social activities. In the "Deliver Hope to Gaza" campaign, though, the level of response was overwhelming – in both the volume of material and the numbers of people wanting to help sort and pack the items. Indeed, it was the volume of items donated that actually sparked the need for volunteers at all.

In order to sustain the campaign's spirit, it was important that everyone who wanted to help should be allowed to do so. This impacted the operations in the warehouse, particularly the means of sorting, but also the hours worked. It meant a much less rigid organizational structure and the rapid embrace of leaders from the volunteer pool to steer the processes.

The ever-changing regulations

The one element of the campaign that defied rational planning was the constant flow of regulations coming from the border. New prohibitions were issued on a daily basis throughout the campaign, which could include any item whether food or clothing – usually without prior notice or explanation. This meant additional staff were required to both communicate the new rules to the volunteers and monitor the packing process to ensure they were upheld.

The impact of people's emotions

In conjunction with the ever-changing rules, one of the biggest challenges of the campaign was to balance the overwhelming desire to help with the increasingly strict rules and regulations concerning the products able to be delivered. With bans on certain items and restrictions on parcel weight, and with each shipment threatened with rejection at the border for failure to comply, volunteers had to be reminded that over-filling boxes or trying to "smuggle" in prohibited items – all for the best intentions – was actually hindering the aid delivery. This was especially difficult when it concerned seemingly harmless items, such as baby food.

Campaign drop-off points UAE Mall of Emirates Deira City Centre Sharjah City Centre Ajman City Centre Ajman City Centre Dordan Pharmacy One (all branches) Fitness First Aramex Offices (4th Circle, Mecca Street and Khalda in Amman, Zarqa, Irbid and Aqaba.) Aramex Media Bookshops (Cozmo and Thaqafa Street)

Lessons Learned

Principal lessons learned from the "Deliver Hope to Gaza" campaign.

"The thought of all the suffering in Gaza made us more motivated to volunteer, to help in the Aramex warehouse, and keep coming back day after day."

Widad RaadPalestinian-American living in Dubai

I. The cause drives everything

The emotional impact of a cause such as Gaza will resolve many of the operational issues, such as recruiting volunteers, erasing social, political and generational differences, and creating both team spirit and discipline.

II. The effectiveness of social entrepreneurs

Involving social entrepreneurs from the outset will enhance the grassroots dimension of a campaign. This proved effective in responding rapidly to a crisis and the constantly evolving challenges.

III. The opportunity for partnership

A company's CSR activities should be open to other corporations and NGOs. An inclusive umbrella, as opposed to an individual corporate campaign, will enable both private and public sector groups to contribute their skills and knowledge to deliver a better result.

IV. The power of online communication

Online social media tools – blogs, Facebook, e-mail and SMS – can be integral to promoting a campaign. They can provide constant updates on a campaign, help recruit volunteers and, when integrated into the overall communication strategy, empower individuals and third parties to champion the campaign – spreading the message at grassroots level credibly and efficiently.

V. The need for clear parameters of participation

The provision of clear, concrete information – places, dates, times, etc – will better harness public activity by establishing the means of participation, thus reducing the need for individual initiative. A centralized unit to provide correct, accurate and timely information should then be established to coordinate the campaign's daily operations.

VI. The ability to capture knowledge

As a campaign winds down, the information on awareness, public activism and networks needs to be gathered and understood for future campaigns.

Relief Components

General lessons from "Deliver Hope to Gaza" that can be harnessed for future public initiatives concerning aid collection, collation and delivery.

Cohesive action

The interplay of the different campaign components



Looking at the general lessons from "Deliver Hope to Gaza", Aramex believes all campaigns need to consider the following components in order to achieve their goals and positively affect public perceptions:

1. Planning and Designing the Campaign Approach

A clear communication strategy is essential for any relief campaign. This begins with the development of an unambiguous slogan and a strong visual identity to convey the campaign's goal and overall spirit. The tone of the message also needs to be considered so that it effectively resonates with the target audience. Partners then have to be sourced to create a network of collection points, while all legal implications of the operations also need to be addressed.

2. Publicity and the Use of Media

The campaign has to be publicized across a range of media channels to generate the widest possible support. While social media practices, with their focus on word-of-mouth communication, can promote operational support on an individual level, print and broadcasting media can create more general awareness and offer a credible picture to the public at large.

3. Management of Stakeholders

Various relevant interest groups, whether employees from other corporations, charitable bodies or individual volunteers, need to be successfully integrated into the workflow of the campaign according to their level of contribution.

4. Operations

An operational model needs to be defined to create an effective workflow according to the circumstances of the campaign. It must also, however, be sufficiently flexible to allow the participants to shape the activities themselves. Delivering the end result should always be considered more important above the process.

Further Reading

Additional resources on Aramex's "Deliver Hope to Gaza" campaign.

For further information on "Deliver Hope to Gaza" and Aramex sustainability and corporate activism initiatives contact:

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"Deliver Hope to Gaza" Facebook group

Facebook.com – search "Deliver Hope to People in Gaza"

7iber.com

www.7iber.com/2009/01/new-7iber-campaigns-how-to-help-gaza/www.7iber.com/2009/01/come-one-come-all-for-gaza-for-palestine/www.7iber.com/2008/12/from-jordan-to-gaza/

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