

Local authority uses artificial intelligence to help handle civil emergencies

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The Milton Keynes emergency planning group, comprising the local authority, general hospital, primary care health trusts, police, ambulance and fire services, is using technology based on artificial intelligence in order to provide fast access to vital information for its members and the public.

The team chose a solution called the Rapid Response Information Service (RRIS), provided by Transversal, the Cambridge-based software company. RRIS is a fully managed, secure online service enabling emergency services personnel to instantly add information to an online knowledgebase. Authorised people can obtain information virtually instantaneously simply by typing questions in natural language, for example, "What are the symptoms of Anthrax poisoning?"

Following the fuel crisis, BSE scare, foot and mouth outbreak and September 11 terrorist attacks, central government and the 432 UK local authorities have come under increasing pressure to improve crisis planning. There is a need to communicate more effectively between emergency services as well as keep the public better informed. This is now being formalised in the Civil Contingencies Bill, which is currently making its way through Parliament.

Milton Keynes' emergency planning team wanted a solution that had the ability to share regularly changing information amongst all the emergency services in an easily accessible electronic format. It also needed to be capable of providing information tailored to public groups while keeping sensitive or restricted information secure.

RRIS is powered by Transversal's Metafaq technology. Metafaq utilises artificial intelligence, enabling any organisation to answer questions posed to their websites or via e-mail automatically. When a question is asked, RRIS returns appropriate responses from a knowledgebase of questions. Only questions that cannot be answered are forwarded to support staff. Their responses are then simultaneously e-mailed back and added to the knowledgebase to be used to answer future queries. The more questions the system receives, the better it becomes at handling queries.

In the case of RRIS, secure access to the knowledgebase can be provided to different emergency services so that information can be shared quickly and easily. All relevant correspondence between services is saved in the knowledgebase. This ensures that experts only have to answer questions once, and anyone asking the same question in future will get an immediate automated response. Password authorised access to different parts of the knowledgebase can easily be made available to other parties, including utility companies, press, public, etc.

New knowledgebases can be created instantly to deal with specific threats. For example, if Milton Keynes' water supply was poisoned a new knowledgebase could be created with access granted to the police, council, ambulance, fire and the water utility companies.

Alastair Bartholomew, emergency planning manager at Milton Keynes Council, said: "RRIS has greatly improved our effectiveness and ability to react to civil contingency threats. This will continue to

improve as the knowledgebase is developed based on expert input, experience and event feedback.

"At a time when the emergency services could find themselves on high alert at short notice, the RRIS provides a cutting edge technological solution that will positively impact key areas of their response. RRIS has revolutionised the way that we are able to capture and share information between the emergency services. We can now proactively plan for civil contingencies and quickly update these plans as an incident unfolds."

Dr Davin Yap, founder of Transversal said: "RRIS is a vital and fascinating use of our technology. Expert information is often hard to obtain at any time, let alone when there is a crisis situation. The RRIS through Transversal's Metafaq ensures that the information is not only stored securely but that it is easily obtainable without the need for any specialist knowledge."

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About Transversal

Transversal was founded in 1998 by two PhDs from Caltech and Cambridge University. Transversal provides cost efficient, web-based customer support and information management solutions through its Metafaq(tm) products. Transversal aims to transform the Web from a passive information-sharing channel into an active knowledge-creation environment. To support this goal it has combined the sophisticated concept matching of its Memory Engine(tm) technology with a modular infrastructure for web-based communications and content management. Transversal is based in Cambridge. Current customers also include Sony, Direct Line, MFI, Fujifilm, TDK Systems, Hotcourses Systems, DfES, Proctor & Gamble and the British Army.

For more information go to www.transversal.com

Further information

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