



## COVID-19 Case Study: Response to Hospitality Organizations

How Empathia's Black Swan Solutions crisis management services helped hospitality organizations respond to outbreaks amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The Background

Lockdowns. Shuttered businesses. Virtual classes. Mask mandates. A surging death toll. The world has been living under the constant shadow of COVID-19.

As the world's understanding of the virus grows, how we live and how we do business has changed – perhaps permanently. But, in the early months of 2020, there was little public awareness in the U.S. of the looming threat. The severity of the developing situation became clearer on March 11 when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic and on March 13, when the U.S. declared a national emergency.

Some of the first large-scale COVID-19 outbreaks to gain the public's attention occurred within the global hospitality industry.

---

### The Challenges

#### ***Early Spread of COVID-19 in the Hospitality Industry***

From the early stages of the pandemic, Empathia was consulting with its global hospitality clients on how best to support individuals affected by an outbreak. These organizations had multiple, global locations impacted – some in very remote areas.

A large number of unknown or evolving variables took a toll on the emotional and physical wellbeing of guests, their loved ones and the organization's staff. Affected guests could be thousands of miles from both home and loved ones. The number and severity of infections varied by location, as did quarantine protocols put in place by the local governments. Some guests were able to quarantine in place, while others were transported to area hospital facilities or quarantine sites.

In addition, those impacted were faced with unprecedented quarantine actions, uncertainty regarding personal health and wellbeing, language and cultural barriers and shifting regulations and guidance from local governments and agencies.

All this served to underscore the need for an up-to-date, but fluid, crisis response and communication plan.

Most hospitality organizations, like the ones Empathia serves, have internal staff to respond to a crisis. When the scale of an incident pulls internal resources in too many directions, having a reliable partner to provide additional support and resources is invaluable. As the virus rapidly spread, there was a critical need for the 24/7 contact center provided by Empathia's Black Swan Solutions. This resource handled the influx of phone inquiries from impacted guests and their loved ones as the situation continued to unfold. Combine unprecedented quarantine actions and uncertainty regarding personal health and wellbeing with the fear and anxiety about the timeline and impact of the virus, the emotional and physical toll on the guests, staff and their off-site family members was immense. Layer on additional variables such as outside interventions and regulations from local government agencies and rapidly changing CDC guidelines, the need for a crisis response and communication plan was critical.

Many of the impacted hospitality organizations working with Empathia employed large, internal family assistance and care teams to help deal with crisis situations. However, due to the scale of the spread of COVID-19, there was a critical need for Black Swan's crisis management team and the incident response contact center. A critical first step was managing the influx of inquiries and phone calls from impacted guests, staff and off-site family members requesting up-to-date information on the ever-changing situation.

---

## The Support

### *Global Support to Hospitality Organizations*

#### **Incident Response Contact Center**

Empathia's 24/7 stand-ready incident response contact center activates within 60 minutes or less of initial notification of the crisis event and has the capacity to process over 5,000 calls per hour. The contact center is staffed with qualified mental health professionals around the clock to handle inbound and outbound calls to accommodate differences in time zones. The contact center was activated for over three months to aid Empathia's hospitality client organizations that initiated Black Swan's services due to the scale of the pandemic.

At the onset of the activation, these clients released the phone numbers for their organization-specific toll-free support lines through corporate websites, social media and traditional media platforms. In addition, these numbers were distributed to guests, family members and staff across all the impacted locations. Inbound calls were received by the contact center from around the world, in multiple languages.

Empathia's team of crisis responders needed to adapt quickly and often due to the ever-changing environment created by the pandemic, the constant changing governmental regulations and the shifting needs of the guests.

#### **Global Network of Crisis Responders**

The activations for Empathia's hospitality clients were spread worldwide. This highlighted unique challenges involved with supporting individuals spread across time zones, languages, cultures and communication styles. Empathia leveraged its global network of crisis responders and partners to ensure 24/7 support, including language interpreters familiar with the nuances of communication and cultural differences.

#### **Family Assistance Services**

Historically, family assistance services have been provided face-to-face at or near impacted locations. Travel restrictions, government advisories and quarantine conditions created the increased need for telephonic access, as well as the need for virtual access to these vital services. With its global reach, Empathia was able to quickly and easily establish this virtual connection to provide accurate and appropriate information, care and support to those involved.



## Information Management

Empathia's proprietary Disaster Information Management System (DIMS®) is an integrated application containing the features and capacities necessary to manage the high volume of people-associated information generated by large-scale critical events. It combines the functions of incident management software and databases that manage demographic characteristics.

Throughout Empathia's COVID-19 activations, DIMS was a crucial tool that gave teams the flexibility needed to continuously collaborate and coordinate data and logistics. DIMS was accessible to responders from both Empathia and the hospitality organizations, providing real-time information in such areas as changes to guest locations, collection of physical status data and communication with guests or families. This in-the-moment data helped responders address and support the unique needs of individuals in personal and meaningful ways.

## Emotional Support for Organizations' Teams

Family assistance teams are typically made up of employees with other roles within the company. Team members are then "activated" when a large-scale incident occurs. These responders may experience high levels of stress and anxiety as they work to meet new and demanding situations. This was true for the hospitality organizations' COVID-19 family assistance teams, especially those physically located in an area coping with an outbreak. The severity of the situation, coupled with the limited information available at the time from reputable health organizations, made a difficult situation that much more stressful.

To help support their people, these hospitality organizations asked Empathia to connect with family assistance team members to offer emotional support, providing them a safe and confidential way to process their experiences.

## Reputation Management

Timely, accurate communication is vital during a crisis. Ensuring those impacted receive the most up-to-date, verified information available can help foster and maintain goodwill between an organization and its stakeholders. It can also deter negative publicity and social media backlash. For these COVID-19 activations, Empathia assisted the client organizations with contacting guests and, if applicable, their emergency contacts to ensure lines of communication remained open and to provide status updates.



## The Impact

### Activation Response Statistics & Reports

**13,000+**

Impacted  
Individuals

**800+**  
Confirmed  
COVID-19 Cases

**68 Days**  
Continuous 24/7 Crisis  
Contact Center Activation

### Crisis Contact Center

#### 11,000+ Inbound Calls

Empathia's team of crisis counselors fielded over 11,000 inbound calls from guests, family members and staff.

#### 8,000+ Outreach Calls

Over 8,000 outreach calls were made to guests, family members and staff, offering emotional support, physical and mental health check-ins, answering questions and providing relevant updates.

**95% of all calls handled by Empathia's team required no further assistance from client organizations.**

# EMPATHIA

Good for People. Good for Business.

## LifeMatters

Employee Assistance  
Programs

## StudentLife

Student Support  
Programs

## Black Swan Solutions

Crisis Management  
Services

---

When you find yourself at the intersection of challenges and compassion, contact us to learn more about our employee assistance, student support and crisis management services. Contact our team at 866.332.9595 or [sales@empathia.com](mailto:sales@empathia.com).

---

## Empathia, Inc.

N17 W24100 Riverwood Drive  
Suite 300  
Waukesha, WI 53188

## Empathia Pacific, Inc.

5234 Chesebro Road  
Suite 201  
Agoura Hills, CA 91301

## Contact Us

[empathia.com](http://empathia.com)  
866.332.9595  
[sales@empathia.com](mailto:sales@empathia.com)

[Request a Quote or More Information](#)

---