

Since 9/11, Henry Schein leads recovery efforts

by Claude Solnik

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After hijacked planes struck the Twin Towers, [Henry Schein](#) mobilized. It had contracts with five hospitals in New York City for just-in-time inventory in case of disasters.

"When [9/11](#) happened, all those hospitals went on alert," said Susan Vasallo, a Henry Schein spokeswoman. "While all the roads were shut down to the majority of the public, Henry Schein trucks immediately deployed on the road to those hospitals in anticipation of survivors."

After finding hospitals weren't flooded with wounded, since thousands had been killed in seconds or escaped unharmed, the firm redeployed trucks to Ground Zero, where rescue workers used masks and other products.

"At that point, we realized Henry Schein has a core expertise. We have health care products in our warehouses that can help in any situation," Vasallo said. "Henry Schein Cares had existed, but this solidified our role in disaster preparedness and relief."

In the past 10 years, Schein has built a huge disaster relief program, helping when disasters hit home and around the world.

Henry Schein Cares, the company's multimillion-dollar program to donate products and services, relies on close links with suppliers, works with nonprofits to set up emergency disaster supply sites worldwide, runs a disaster hotline for providers and sends in an army of workers to damaged doctors' and dentists' offices, loaning equipment as needed.

In the process, they've helped thousands, won recognition and boosted their business.

"We're not doing this for pure philanthropy. We're not building castles in the sky. We do things that let us do well in business and do good things in society," said Steve Kess, who leads Henry Schein Cares. "We helped doctors redesign practices, spent tens of thousands of dollars to work with them. When they got their insurance checks and rebuilt their office, they bought the stuff from us."

Schein since 9/11 has responded to numerous disasters, but [Hurricane Katrina](#) was the first test of its expanded program.

After learning thousands of residents stranded in the Superdome needed toothbrushes, Schein contacted [Colgate](#).

"We told them we had 80,000 units of their product in our [New Orleans area] warehouse and asked for permission to use them on their behalf to donate to citizens in New Orleans in the Superdome," Kess said. "Within two hours, they came back and said, 'Ship it as quickly as possible. We'll replace your inventory at no charge. We're making the donation.'"

The world's biggest distributor of products to hospital and dental offices also helped providers, after learning 850 dental and 1,700 family practice offices were destroyed by Katrina.

"The doctors and dentists were dazed," Kess said. "The communities they served were no longer there."

Schein dispatched a small army of experts in insurance, real estate and disaster recovery to help health care professionals. The firm loaned used equipment to providers, whether or not they were its customers, and helped firms get back up and running.

Schein since 9/11 has repeatedly been recognized as No. 1 for social responsibility in [Fortune magazine's](#) most admired list for its sector.

"We created a whole culture in the organization with hundreds of countries who get involved with the organizations we're talking about," Kess said of the firm's post-9/11 focus on disaster recovery.

Schein in disaster areas frequently suspends accounts receivable for 60 to 90 days, provides emergency aid and loans equipment until new products can be purchased.

The company, which works with 2,500 suppliers and has more than 200,000 products in warehouses, also donates its own inventory.

"The objects have more value than just money," Kess said. "Our emphasis is on helping health happen. If we were a bank, we might donate cash. Our core competency is the supplies."

After realizing most disasters require the same basic supplies, Schein in 2006 set up large volumes of material likely to be needed in disasters, at nonprofit group warehouses worldwide.

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Shipments include more than 50 products, such as medications, splinting, burn products, surgical products, field dressings and products for concussions and fractures.

"What you send in early has to be critical to what they need," Kess said. "You're trying to find people whose lives you can save. Everything that needs to be done in those first 72 hours deals with life saving problems."

Since transportation is key, Schein works with the [UPS Foundation](#), which lets it tap UPS for quick, free delivery in disasters.

Schein realizes that product sometimes gets held up at customs, due to bureaucracy or bribery. But it's working to develop a system that allows certain organizations to be pre-approved to send certain products around the world.

"We want to create a health care response kit that would be preapproved by the customs agents of countries around the world," Kess said. "So when it arrives at the time of disaster, it goes directly to workers who need the product."