



In Perspective

ReliefConnect was created in response to the earthquake in Mexico on September 19, 2017. It wasn't ready in time, but it was ready for the hurricane that struck Puerto Rico and the Las Vegas shooting that occurred not long after on October 1.

2017 was a year of intense disaster between earthquakes, hurricanes and massacres. I wanted to help in any way I can, but as a college student I felt limited. Thankfully, we live in an age of technology where messages can reach thousands of people thousands of miles away in a matter of moments. I found a way to help by using Python and the power of social media.



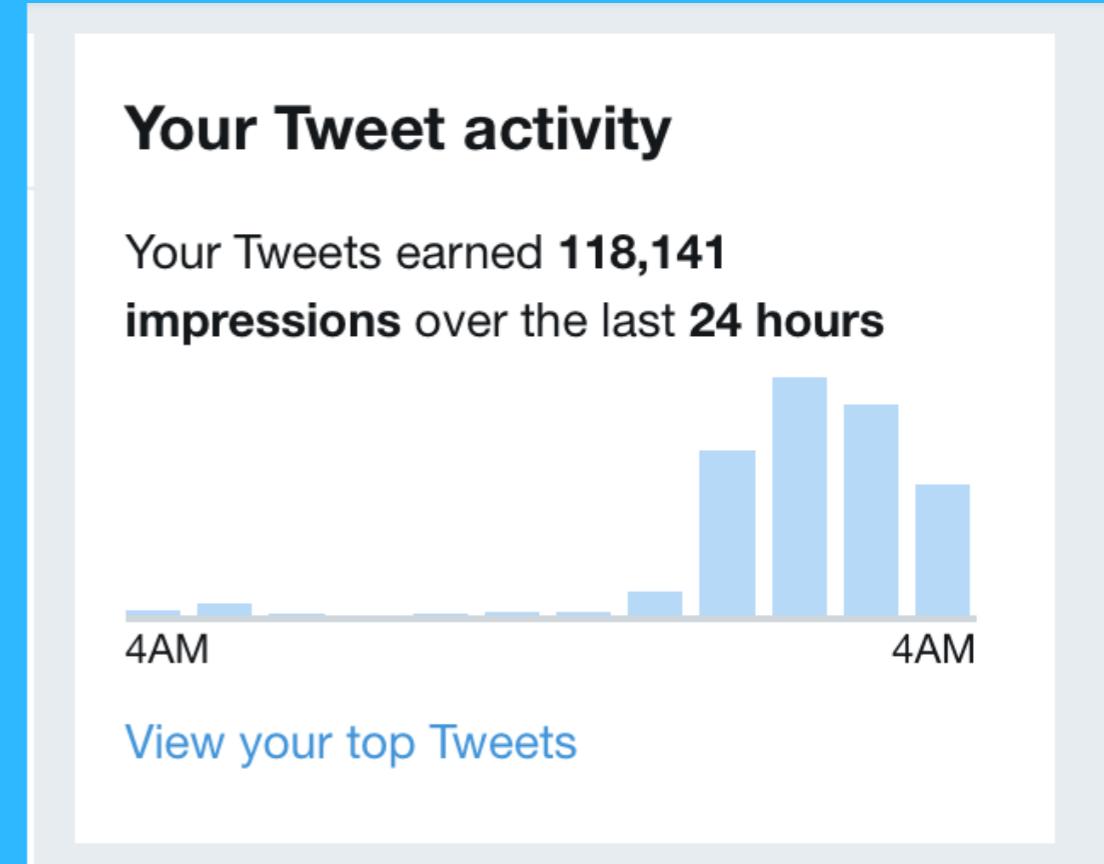
What It Is

ReliefConnect is a Twitterbot written in Python to interact with the Twitter API and use Markov chains to read from a text file and randomly choose from select phrases when generating tweets.

The bot searched the API, found tweets using the dominant hashtag associated with the disaster, and replied with a message including the link to the leading donation effort.

It was important to use Markov chains like this in order to randomize the text of the message so that it would look more natural and not be so quickly detected as spam by Twitter.

By sending out hundreds of tweets per second and mass spreading the donation effort, I figured it would be shut down eventually, but my goal was to get it in front of as many eyes as possible and mass spread information about raising money for relief and put it in front of those likely to donate. In the end, it managed to reach many people and specifically 118,000+ people on the highest day.

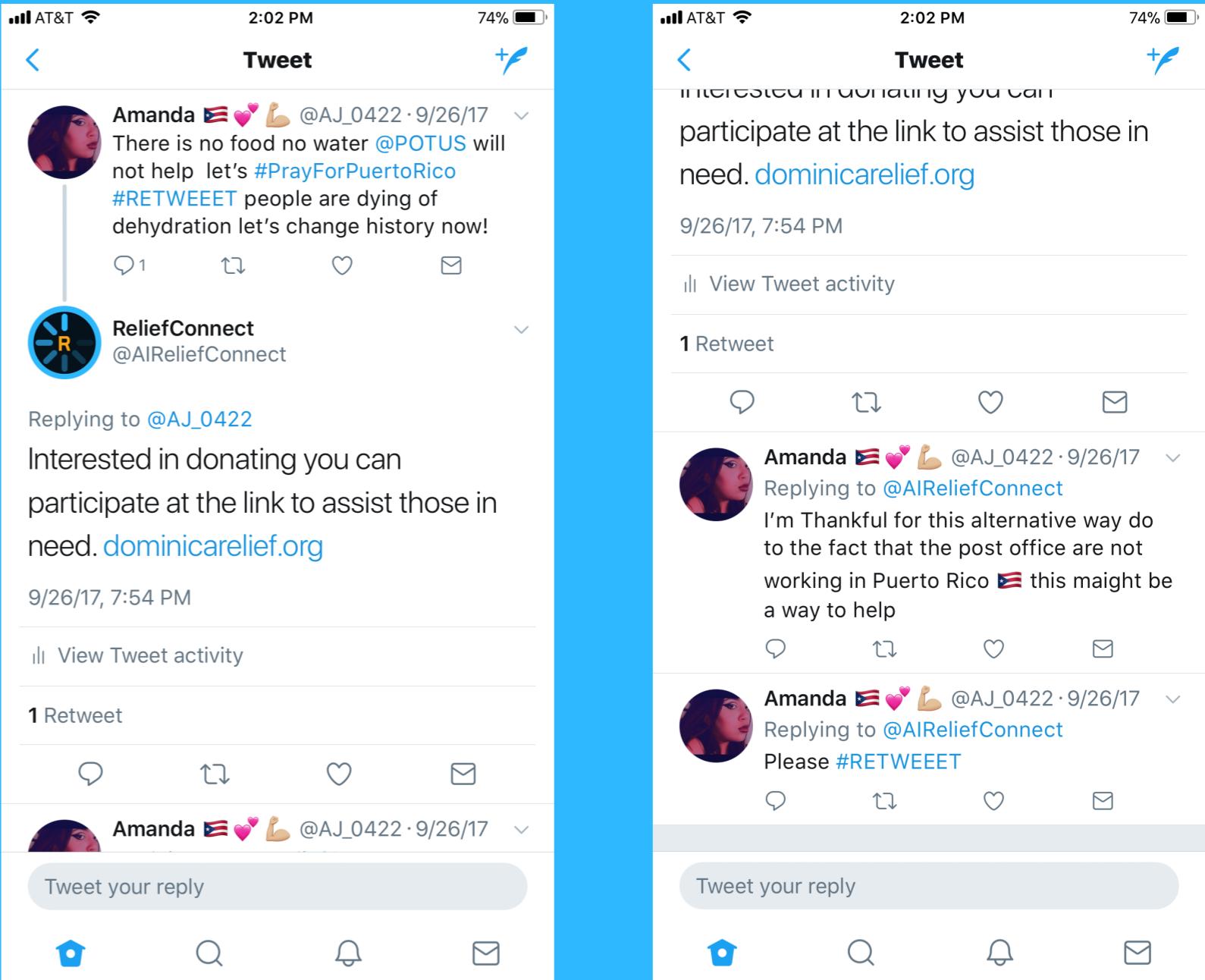


Puerto Rico

The first time ReliefConnect was operational was moments before the hurricane struck Puerto Rico.

I put the target hashtag as “#PrayForPuertoRico” and let it run in my dorm as I went to classes. I was surprised to come back and see people interacting with my bot and expressing gratitude.

It ran for two days before it was shut down by Twitter for the first time and detected as spam. I made some modifications to the response rate, sent an email to Twitter, and got it back online.



Las Vegas

The second time I brought it online was during the recovery period of the Las Vegas shooting. This one was far more personal to me because I lived in Las Vegas before coming to college, and that's where all my friends and family live. I was away at college at the University of Southern California, and it was hard to hear that my friends back home were hurting and it felt like I was much farther than I actually was.

This time the hashtag was “#VegasStrong” and it caught the attention of TV personality Stef Michaels, aka adventuregirl. She has 1.4M followers and tweeted about the bot and the relief effort increasing the attention for both.

Donations were raised for general relief efforts and some for specific medical funding for the 851 injured in the span of ten minutes.

Tweets 22.7K Following 3,515 Followers 1.4M Likes 11.1K Lists 9

adventuregirl [@adventuregirl](#) Follows you

Hi! I'm Stef Michaels/Travel is my life! Founder of Adventuregirl.com lifestyle journalist/TV personality/Vanity Fair Mag's America's Tweetheart

Sharing Life's Adventures! [adventuregirl.com](#) 513K Vine Loops [View broadcasts](#) Joined November 2008

[Tweet to](#) [Message](#)

2 Followers you know  2,241 Photos and videos


\$2,150,728 of \$2.5M goal Raised by 21,020 people in 32 hours
Created October 2, 2017 [View campaign](#) [Share on Facebook](#)

adventuregirl [@adventuregirl](#) · 15h Special Thanks to @DianeBMorrison for this important list of How to Help #LasVegas Victims+their Families below #VegasStrong #howtodonate

Diane Morrison [@DianeBMorrison](#) Replying to @adventuregirl @The_Trump_Train gofundme.com/dr2ks2-las-veg....

adventuregirl [@adventuregirl](#) · 15h City of Las Vegas, adventuregirl, Diana Edelman and 4 others

Who to follow · Refresh · View all

Lonely Planet [@lonely...](#) Follow

Ryan Penagos [@AgentM](#) Follow

Alison Sudol [@AlisonS...](#) Follow

Find people you know

Trends for you · Change

#NationalBoyfriendDay @Karinnaa_a, @hrsnsu and 6 more are Tweeting about this

#LasVegasShooting 61.2K Tweets

#womenpodcasters 1,291 Tweets

#MeanGirlsDay Happy Mean Girls Day!

#StupidQuestionsForBartenders 2,965 Tweets

#VFSummit 1,355 Tweets

#Yahoo 2,131 Tweets

#TuesdayThoughts



Conclusion and Reflection

Because of the rapid rate of connection, ReliefConnect was still recognized as spam by Twitter. It has since been shut down, but it served its purpose well during the times when it was most important.

I learned a lot about rapid prototyping of programs in response to time sensitive events. There were hundreds of tests run again and again while reading the news of the earthquakes in Mexico. So many verions and iterations were created in the span of 3 days.

I was in a design class at the time and was able to use Adobe Illustrator to make the design and color scheme to match the Python/Twitter color scheme in a matter of minutes.

When it felt like the world was falling apart, it was important to fail as fast as possible and get back up

even faster. Thankfully due to open source technology, Github, and accessible APIs, something was able to be made with speed and effectiveness.

This did not change the world, but in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” and I did just that. I did what I could, where I was, with what I had, and it worked.



