

Planning in Pictures—the future of critical incident planning and response

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Scan the reports and official statements in the wake of an active shooter or mass casualty incident, and you'll see the same observations and statements show up again and again. Looking at just a pair of airport shootings (one in Los Angeles, the other in Fort Lauderdale) yields the following parallel observations and admissions: "hampered by poor communication and a lack of coordination between agencies," "problems that contributed to a chaotic evacuation and delays reaching victims," "deputies were unfamiliar with the airport's layout, which caused delays responding," "the aviation department denied access to airport blueprints to SWAT teams trying to sweep and secure the terminals," "officers arriving at the airport didn't know where to go."

If you continue to dive into the myriad of post-incident reports in the wake of mass casualty incidents in the United States, you'll quickly notice the frequency with which we continue to experience these problems stemming from the lack of a common language and lack of spatial awareness.

The reason lies in the inherent difficulty in trying to use text-based plans in the time-compressed chaos of an actual incident. From the days of Columbine, virtually every industry, profession, and institution has endeavored to develop and promulgate emergency action plans. Many highly-skilled and well-intentioned professionals have put their efforts and energy into developing effective plans. Unfortunately, those plans typically reside in dust-covered three-ring binders on a bookshelf (or the modern digital equivalent) in the form of thousands-upon-thousands of words. In the time-compressed space surrounding an actual incident, these text-based plans predictably fail to be put into action based on the following challenges:

- When an incident occurs, can you locate your binder or digital equivalent in a timely manner?
- If you find it, can you search through the hundreds of pages to find the specific information you need?
- If you can find the information you need, can you disseminate it to the ever-growing number of emergency responders from multiple jurisdictions who are descending upon the scene?
- If you can beat the odds and locate your plan, the page within the plan, and disseminate it to the intended recipients—can they read, understand, and communicate off of the plan in time to mitigate and minimize the casualties?

Objectively evaluating those questions brings to light an unrelenting truth: In order for a plan to be real it must be both *accessible* and *understandable*. Accessible means having the ability to easily get the plan into the hands

of first responders and commanders. Understandable means that the end user can digest it in less than a minute and put it into action.

Imagine if you, and every member of your department could have every emergency plan and floor plan for all of the schools and critical infrastructure in your jurisdiction right in your pocket on their smart phone. Imagine that when you looked at that those plans on your phone you could see yourself and the other first responders on that plan, in real time.

On the surface, this seems like an insurmountable task. Fortunately for us, a well-known and highly successful organization has handed us a proven, battle-tested solution. The United States Military Special Operations Command has spent more than a decade and billions of dollars fighting the global war on terror. Faced with the challenge of an ever-accelerating pace and the need to coordinate numerous teams from multiple branches, SOCOM perfected the art of planning with pictures. Visual planning is the foundation of every special operations mission conducted by SOCOM. Gone are the voluminous text-based plans that took weeks to prepare. In their place are highly-functional visual plans that contain aerial imagery combined with a scale alpha-numeric grid and key plan components. Speak to any operator from the SOCOM world and they will surely tell you that they wouldn't dream of going out on a mission without one of these visual plans.

When SEAL Team 6 was tasked with killing or capturing Usama Bin Laden during Operation Neptune Spear, they had every conceivable resource of the United States government at their disposal. Should they have requested it, they could have had any singular tool they desired to plan that operation. With nearly limitless resources and options, they chose a singular piece of paper—the visual plan.

That plan, known in the military as a Gridded Reference Graphic (GRG), can be seen sitting unassumingly in front of Secretary Clinton in the famous White House Situation Room photo captured during the operation. The power of that photo is just now being realized. Back in May of 2011, while US public safety professionals still plodded along with text-based plans, everyone connected with Neptune Spear—from the President of the United States to the SEAL operator in Abbottabad, Pakistan half a world away—was looking at the same piece of paper: a GRG of the plan.



The Gridded Reference Graphic has now come home, and is available as its domestic evolution—the Collaborative Response Graphic (CRG®). CRGs combine aerial imagery, floor plans, critical features, and key plan components into a simple to decipher geospatially accurate graphic. When viewed on a GPS-enabled smart device, the user is plotted on top of the plan in real time.

The grid allows for a common language and instant visualization of plan components. A contact team trying to communicate the location of a shooter in the band room doesn't need to know anything about the building. They simply need to transmit that the shooter is in the room located within grid square E3. Whether or not you've ever set foot in the fictional National High School (depicted below), it takes mere seconds to gain full spatial awareness.



It doesn't matter whether you're from a local, county, or state level agency. It doesn't matter if you're a cop, medic, or firemen. There's no need to know local terminology or discipline-specific nomenclature. There's no hunting for floor plans. There's no racing through three-ring binders.

With a CRG, the plan is accessible and understandable. Hundreds of pages can be reduced to a single, easily understood and GeoRelevant™ plan. Using BAE Systems GXP OpsView™ and GXP OnScene™ first responders logged into the free and secure smart device application can instantly communicate in a common language, changes in plans, critical safety updates and adjust resources with pinpoint accuracy. The application allows first responders to visualize their location on the actual plan, and incident commanders the ability to better coordinate the scene because assets can be tracked in real time, regardless of the agency or public safety discipline they represent.

For the first time in the history of public safety, everyone will literally be on the same page.

For More information on Critical Response Group and CRGs®, please visit www.CRGPlans.com