

# Inside the Haiti Earthquake

*Survive. Report. Save Lives.*

<http://insidethehaitiearthquake.com/>

"*Inside the Haiti Earthquake* reaches **the zenith of web design** – it's compelling, beautiful, interactive, and impossible to look away from [...] **an amazing example of how to capture and communicate an important moment in time**, and a triumph of the power of the Web – all made possible by some amazing design and development work."

- [Website Magazine](#), May 2011



[Inside the Haiti Earthquake](#) is an online simulation that allows users to experience the aftermath of Haiti's January 2010 earthquake as a survivor, aid worker, or journalist.

Combining a provocative script with real-life documentary footage, photos, and stories from Haiti, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* allows users to experience the complexities of disaster relief for themselves.

## Awards & Recognition

### 2011 Games for Change Awards

Winner - Transmedia

### 2011 Webby Awards

Honoree - Best Writing in Online Film & Video

### 2011 Applied Arts Interactive Awards

Winner - Gaming

### 2011 HistoryMakers Awards

Nominee - Best Interactive Production

### 2010 Horizon Interactive Awards

Winner - Best in Show

Winner - Best in Category (Flash Websites)

### 2010 Canadian New Media Awards

Nominee - Best Cross-Platform Project

Nominee - Best Web-Based Game



## Inside Disaster: a Multi-Platform Documentary

*Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is one of three components of the multi-platform documentary project, [Inside Disaster](#).

**Inside Disaster** (release: January 2011) is a three-part documentary series that follows the Red Cross humanitarian response to the January 2010 Haiti earthquake from the inside.

[InsideDisaster.com](#) is an interactive website that combines content and themes from the documentary series with original photo, video and research created by the 16-person web team. *InsideDisaster.com* is the definitive online resource about the Haiti earthquake and humanitarian work.

[Inside the Haiti Earthquake](#) is a first-person simulation that combines jaw-dropping footage and stories from the *Inside Disaster* documentary with original video, photos, and music recorded by Nicolas Jolliet in Haiti. The result is a genre-bending interactive experience that lets users step inside life on the ground in the chaotic aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.

## The Stories

Through the *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* simulation, users can experience the aftermath of the January 2010 quake through any of three overlapping storylines: that of the aid worker, the survivor, or the journalist.

**The Journalist** is an independent reporter trying to assemble a breaking news report for the evening's news broadcast; they must choose a story angle without falling prey to their biases - and decide whether the story is more important than saving a life.

**The Survivor** has lost everything, and must decide whether to join with others, struggle alone, or give up hope entirely. Their story goes inside the rich everyday life, music, and stories of Haiti's camps, while revealing how their goals can conflict with those of the journalist and aid worker.

**The Aid Worker** is a maverick humanitarian who has flown to Haiti on their own to distribute relief items. They must negotiate the everyday complexities of aid delivery on the ground, while deciding whether to collaborate with the big aid agencies, listen to Haitians, or go at it alone.



"I wanted to create an interweaving storyline that connected the three main characters, and also revealed the conflict between them" says the simulation's Writer and Co-Director, Michael Gibson.

"Rather than offering the user solutions and opinions, we let people experience the doubt, chaos, and shock that most of us felt in Haiti," says Co-Director Nicolas

Jolliet, who spent six weeks in the country as part of the *Inside Disaster* project.

"This is not a game," says Interactive Producer Katie McKenna. "There are no points in the simulation, no 'winning' and 'losing'. There are only decisions and consequences. Our goal was to approximate how people learn in real life -- by making mistakes and experiencing the fallout."

Users have the opportunity to experience all three roles from a first-person perspective. In doing so, they are able to achieve a deeper understanding of the conflicts and challenges of disaster relief than through a strictly linear documentary narrative.



## The Process

Producer Katie McKenna brought Nicolas Jolliet and Michael Gibson together in Fall 2009 to begin their collaboration around the online simulation.

At that time, the *Inside Disaster* documentary and web team knew they'd be following the Red Cross into their next major relief operation -- but they didn't know where or when the disaster would occur.

"It was daunting," says Katie McKenna. "I wasn't sure at first exactly how we were going to pull this off -- but I knew we had the right team to do it."

Nicolas Jolliet played multiple roles on *Inside the Haiti Earthquake*, including Co-Director, Cinematographer, Sound Recordist, Editor, Composer, and Music Supervisor. Jolliet is an experienced documentary filmmaker ([Harvest](#), [Aluku Liba](#)) and musician who

speaks French, English, and Creole, and had previous experience filming in extreme circumstances.

Co-Director and Writer Michael Gibson is an award-winning “serious gaming” expert and co-founder of [Zapdramatic](#), an award-winning media company which produces serious games and simulations for entertainment and life skills development.

“From the beginning, all three of us were committed to the idea of the simulation unfolding through the eyes of the three main players in any disaster relief operation -- the survivors, the aid workers, and the media,” says Katie McKenna.



“I was attracted to the challenge of the material itself,” says Michael Gibson. “How do we create a first-person role play simulation of a monumental event, using raw documentary footage, from three different points of view?”

Because the team didn’t know the specifics of where or what the disaster event would be, the first draft of the script couldn’t be written until the disaster occurred, and the team departed for the field.

On January 11th, 2010, the call arrived: an earthquake had just struck the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

## Haiti

Within three hours of the earthquake, the *Inside Disaster* documentary and web crew were en route to the Dominican Republic to rendezvous with the Red Cross team and travel into Haiti.

Once the team arrived in Port-au-Prince, Nicolas Jolliet began working independently from the documentary crew; equipped with a lightweight camera and sound gear, a laptop for editing, and a satellite modem, he filed mini-documentaries and written blogs from the capital 3-4 times per week for the *InsideDisaster.com* website.

Working with two young local Haitian “fixers,” [Emmanuel Midi and Johnny Pierrot](#), Jolliet used inconspicuous camera equipment and his fluency in French and Creole to reach stories and camps that other media couldn’t.

“I wanted to show the challenges faced by the survivors, from their own point of view. I wasn’t under the same pressure as the mainstream reporters to create news stories. I was able to spend time with the people, get to know them, and show their culture and personality.



“I tried to put the human beauty and strength I saw in Haiti in the foreground, even the horror and despair were always in the background.”

## The Script

Nicolas Jolliet and the documentary crew returned from Haiti in February 2010 with over 200 hours of film and 1500+ photographs between them.

To create the first draft of the the script, Gibson and Jolliet spent hours looking through footage for storylines, while Gibson interviewed Nadine Pequenezza, the director of the *Inside Disaster* documentary series, about what she witnessed in the country while filming survivors, and the Red Cross.

Gibson probed for stories about how survivors, media, and relief workers interacted after the disaster, focusing on the challenges, conflicts, and moments of human empathy that arose that arose between them.



Within the simulation, key moments and themes are revisited within the different character's storylines -- allowing users to experience the same "scene" from multiple points of view.

"I was inspired by Akira Kurosawa's [Rashomon](#), where three witnesses to an event told vastly conflicting accounts of what happened" says Michael Gibson.

"What interested me was not just the differing points of view but also how those differing accounts revealed the underlying interests that the witnesses wanted to conceal. It seemed to me that there was something of that going on in Haiti."

## Production

With the first draft of Gibson's script in place, Jolliet began editing the footage and photographs from Haiti into over 150 numbered scenes.

Lead Developer Nicole Chung created the first draft of the Flash XML framework for the project, while Graphic Designer Peter Henderson drafted the simulation's user experience, look and feel.



The volume of material and multiple storylines turned versioning, organization, and communication into constant challenges for the team. They collaborated through Google docs to refine the script, pacing, and editing over a period of six months.

In August 2010, Jolliet returned to Haiti for a week-long trip to film the final pickups for the simulation. During that time, he worked with a Haitian English teacher, Falaune Louis Jacques, to record the haunting narration track for the simulation's "Survivor" character.

Jolliet also collaborated with Port-au-Prince musicians like Nadine Bonne Annee and Negrillions to record a rich, authentic soundtrack and soundscape for the simulation.

"Because I'm a musician as well as a filmmaker, I try to try to incorporate local music and sounds into all of my films. When I was in Port-au-Prince, I was naturally drawn to, and befriended local musicians who were recovering from the quake.

"I didn't want to build a generic TV soundtrack for the simulation. I wanted to capture the soul and essence

of the local sound. Luckily I got to meet fantastic singers, young musicians and voodoo drummers, and was able to remix and rework these rhythms and sounds into our soundtrack.



“To me, these voices evoke the pain and despair that was in the air in Haiti after the quake -- but also the people’s strength and life.”

## Launch

Over the course of its production, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* involved over 20 creative collaborators from both Canada and Haiti.

For the project leads, the final product has been difficult to define, lying somewhere between the new media worlds of “[serious games](#),” “[newsgames](#),” and interactive documentary.

“We don’t call it a game” says Michael Gibson. “With few exceptions, everything you see onscreen is documentary material from the first days after the earthquake in Haiti. These are real people living real experiences; it’s certainly not a game for them, and we want the user to feel that way too.”

Inside the Haiti Earthquake and its companion website, [InsideDisaster.com](#), launched in Fall 2010 to critical acclaim (see page 1 for awards listing).

The simulation is currently being distributed through blogs, educational and humanitarian websites. The team’s focus is on getting the simulation in front of as broad an audience as possible:

“This project is for anyone who’s even given money to an aid organization and wanted to know why things aren’t changing fast enough on the ground,” says Katie McKenna.

“It’s for people who show up to help in natural disasters without training, resources, or being able to speak the local language, and are in danger of doing more harm than good.

“And it’s for people who are interested in the complex, and sometimes contradictory, roles played by the media in disasters-- that their work is essential in getting the story out, but rushed, shallow reporting can sometimes reinforce unhelpful stereotypes.”

*Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is available free of charge at <http://insidethehaitiearthquake.com/>, and also as a playable DVD.

For information about the project and distribution, please contact PTV Productions, below.

## About PTV Productions

PTV Productions Inc. is an established, diverse & innovative producer of documentaries, lifestyle, factual series, and digital media; the company has produced over 60 hours of programming and several websites.

<http://ptvproductions.ca/>

## Contact

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Interactive Producer

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For more information:

**Inside Disaster:** <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/>

**Inside the Haiti Earthquake:**

<http://insidethehaitiearthquake.com/>

## Credits (full bios available [here](#))

### Produced by

PTV Productions

*Based on footage from the documentary series Inside Disaster, directed by Nadine Pequenezza, and footage and photographs by Nicolas Jolliet*



### Executive Producers

Andrea Nemtin & Ian Dunbar

### Producer

Katie McKenna

### Directed by

Nicolas Jolliet and Michael Gibson

### Writer

Michael Gibson

### Lead Developer

Nicole Chung

### Graphic Designer

Peter Henderson

### Cinematography

Nicolas Jolliet  
Stefan Randström  
Tony Wannamaker

### Location Sound Recordists

Paul Adlaf  
Nicolas Jolliet  
Simon Paine

### Editor

Nicolas Jolliet

### Composer/ Music Supervisor

Nicolas Jolliet

### Narrators

Falaune Louis Jacques  
Gloria Slade  
Matthew Thompson

### New Media Assistant

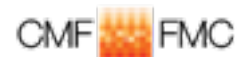
Lucas Ng

### Music

Nadine Bonne Annee  
Nicolas Jolliet  
Coloby Luckson  
Negrillon  
Santia Theodore  
Hugues Ybrahim

### Funders

Produced in association with TVOntario, and the participation of the Canada Media Fund (CMF-FMC) and Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund:



Program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international

With the assistance of the government of Ontario -  
The Ontario Digital Media Tax Credit.

