

## **Business Continuity Plans need a multi faceted communications approach**

*The real time enterprise is a reality. Driven by today's industry demands for ever increasing levels of efficiency, productivity and flexibility, enterprises are needing to communicate on a daily basis, 24 -7, even through the most severe events, and are leveraging new business procedures and technologies to address this dynamic environment. Downtime is simply not an option, which is why a robust emergency communications strategy should be a vital component of every company's Business Continuity plan. It is therefore ironic, says Chris Jones, CEO PageOne that resilient communications plans are normally the weakest link in a business continuity plan with the tendency to rely on a single technology such as mobile phones, landlines or email.*

Championing Business Continuity needs to be a holistic management process that identifies potential impacts that threaten an organisation at both a national and local level, and provides a communications framework with the capability for an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, reputation, brand and value creating activities. Historically, businesses saw Business Continuity Management simply as that of disaster recovery; creating a plan to recover from an unforeseen event such as a fire or flood. The plan often involved an off-site facility where a set of minimum business critical systems were available to receive a copy of the latest back-up tapes. The systems would then be reloaded and brought online within 24-48 hours depending on the environment.

This singular model cannot work in today's demanding environment. Getting your data in order by formulating a disaster recovery plan is just one component of an overall Business Continuity strategy. What is therefore frightening is that according to recent research conducted by analyst IDC, one in five large businesses in the UK still do not have a detailed continuity plan in place, but 71 % of firms have a disaster recovery plan! Some businesses do not even know the difference between a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan, it is only when they are struck by a calamity that they learn. What is needed is a continuous BC plan that focuses on the people, processes and systems supporting the business, to create an operational model that enables the continuation of all critical business processes throughout critical events.

### *The meaning of Business Continuity*

A comprehensive strategy for communicating urgent information to the right people at the right time is essential in order to protect corporate reputation. Organisations must be able to engage constantly in co-ordinated, consistent and accurate internal and external communications, and deploy a number of different communication tools. When disaster hits, any business has a duty and obligation to all its stakeholders, employees, shareholders, investors, customers and suppliers; employees can sue if they are endangered while on the job, existing investors may lose confidence, potential investors may decide to invest in a business that is more proactive; regulators will be laying charges for non-compliance of legislations such as Sarbanes-Oxley and SEC regulations and customers may find an alternative reliable supplier.

For those who doubt the validity of having a communications strategy within a Business Continuity plan, the only effective way to drive the message home is to ask them to measure the value of the businesses critical communications investment against risk – the potential cost of not having critical communications in place.

### *Having The Most Robust System*

It is vital to stress that one form of communication does not fit all within a Business Continuity plan. Multiple channels of communication, including SMS messaging, offer the best chances of maintaining contact in a crisis. For example, during the 7/7 bomb attacks on London, mobile phone networks were overwhelmed, but relying on a messaging system continued to allow emergency teams to maintain communications. The advantage of a paging network is its ability to broadcast messages to many pagers simultaneously combined with better coverage and in-building penetration than mobile phones. This makes the service suitable for high reliability applications. Also, relying purely on email can be a problem if access to your facilities is blocked, for example by chemical spillage or a gas leak. Whether clients are notifying rescue teams or organising mass evacuation, a rapid response is vital.



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Don't disregard SMS within a Business Continuity communications plan as not only can it be easily integrated into your existing systems but it enables specific targeting and efficient mass distribution of messages to any combination of mobiles, pagers and email addresses independent of network. Incident co-ordinators can also be informed when SMS messages are delivered ensuring they can make informed decisions or escalate where necessary. Message delivery status reports and comprehensive message logs allow for post incident auditing and reporting.

Improving communications also has a wider positive impact on an organisation. Our experience has shown us that an organisation will initially implement a messaging system for the purpose of communicating critical information in a disaster recovery scenario, but soon find that the systems flexibility means that it can also be utilised in other areas of the business, to enhance communication, reduce costs and increase overall efficiency.

*Don't wait until the horse has bolted*

A robust emergency communications strategy is a vital component of every company's Business Continuity Plan. Multiple channels of communication using SMS, paging and mobile offer businesses a robust and diverse network with the best chances of maintaining contact in a crisis. We live in an uncertain world, and although the risks of damaging external events may be slim, if the worst happens, good preparation and communication is key - don't wait for a crisis to find out that your communications are not up to scratch.