

Business Continuity – Integrate and Innovate!

We live in uncertain times – few of us will argue with that! Is this making management accept the need for improved Business Continuity (BC) Planning? Maybe – but greater management focus is on declining revenues and profitability resulting from uncertainty, recession and their effects on the global economy.

This management focus means that some awkward questions are being asked about allocation of resources to BCM and the approaches which are taken to planning including:

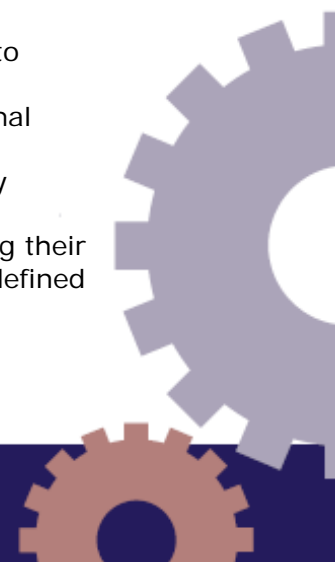
1. Why pay subscriptions for what is perceived as 'empty' office space and unused computer hardware. Can we pay for such recovery space and facilities when we need it rather than as an insurance policy?
2. A lot has been spent on developing our BC plan. Are specialist BC staff or contractors really now needed to maintain and test this plan, particularly with limited new systems development or new products. Can non-specialist internal resources do this work?
3. Can new technologies such as Storage Area Networks, remote systems access and internet-enabled out of town business centres provide a better BC solution at lower cost – as well as covering new risks such as chemical, biological and major terrorist attack?
4. How can we cut BC-related spend in line with cuts in headcount and system spend?

Failure to appreciate management motivations and react to issues pro-actively will increasingly leave BC practitioners and suppliers looking out of touch and too expensive! It also provides ammunition for other functions to offer alternative approaches to BC planning which defends their own budgets and resources. Our response must be to contribute to the corporate goal of cutting costs by re-locating on two areas – integration and innovation.

Integration

BC practitioners should focus on handing over BC Relating tasks to business and support functions and on integrating this work to the normal activities of those functions. For example:

- Maintenance of crisis communications contact lists should be handed to Human Resources
- IT should include recoverability of systems, networks etc in their normal activities
- Crisis media management plans should be developed and managed by Marketing/PR
- Business function managers should be made responsible for identifying their critical functions and systems and producing recovery plans within a defined framework
- Maintenance of BC Plans should be prompted by normal change management processes



The role of the BC resource should be to a) develop the integrated planning framework, b) define how management can assure themselves planning has been completed and test properly (may be using better-trained auditors or specialist consultants on an 'as needed' basis); and c) carrying out training. When these tasks are completed the ongoing amount of the perceived 'specialist' BC resource will reduce to only 10% of its previous level.

Innovation

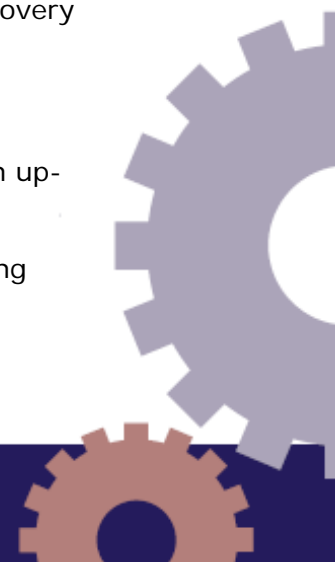
Suppliers are increasingly relying on renewal of existing contracts to maintain the bulk of their revenue stream. However, new technologies are changed business levels often mean that renewal of an existing contract of recovery strategy is not the best option for the customer.

Little real innovation has taken place in the last 4-5 years in the BC market. It is time that suppliers did more to address the cost motivations of management by:

1. Providing more flexible contracts which allow changes to numbers of standby desks (including location) and technology within a contract term.
2. Turning workplace recovery sites into managed office facilities which can be used both for BC requirements and business-as-usual requirements such as conferences, training, systems testing etc. The best form of testing of a BC site is to use it for such activities. In addition this can provide an extra revenue stream for suppliers enabling them to reduce pure BC-related charges whilst maintaining revenue.
3. Pro-actively offering integrated technology solutions such as Storage Area Networks, Data Vaulting, Remote Systems Access and Applications Anywhere to reduce the need for hardware and office space dedicated solely to BC requirements.
4. Proposing shorter, more focused consultancy projects and services rather than the total lifecycle solutions and support.
5. Offering specialist consultants on a 'retainer' or 'call-off' basis to provide the 10% of the BC activity focused on strategy, project management and crisis management/scenario testing.
6. Enabling recovery data and processes to be merged into an organisation's own databases and procedures rather than segregating BC products (e.g. recovery data being held within asset databases, offering back-up/recovery hardware as part of a total maintenance contract).

BC planners must also be prepared to innovate by

1. Adapting their ways of working to focus on reducing the time spent on up-front analysis and delivering solutions more quickly
2. Pro-actively proposing solutions linked to new technologies and working methods of their organisations



3. Broadening their value to an organization by becoming involved in operational functions where they can add value, such as change management, IT security, operational risk etc
4. Being prepared to demonstrate improved cost-benefits from the BC process.

Conclusion

BC practitioners and suppliers should focus on integration and innovation rather than standard process and recovery models. Only those that do this will thrive – sooner or later those that don't will lose management support which is the kiss of death for a Business Continuity Management function.

John Halfacre

January 2010

