



Effective Communications in Business Continuity Planning

Leveraging global conferencing to minimize and manage
disruptive events

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Executive Summary

According to FEMA's "Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry," communication is essential to any business operation, and is one of the core operational considerations of emergency management. It is the glue that binds the processes and procedures established by an organization to protect their resources and hasten a return to normalcy in the wake of a crisis or disaster.

In 2009 alone, there were 335 disasters and economic damages of \$41.3 billion on a worldwide basis.¹ However, it is not just natural disasters and pandemics that can cause downtime and have a significant negative impact on employee productivity, customer retention, and the confidence of vendors, partners, and customers. Power outages, IT failures, and human error are common causes of disruptions to internal and external communications. According to Forrester, improving business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities is the top priority for SMBs and the second highest priority for enterprises over the next 12 months.² By placing communications at the center of business continuity planning, an organization can provide guidance and instructions to employees, while communicating with the appropriate authorities and maintaining contact with external stakeholders.

This paper demonstrates through practical examples how the use of audio, web and video conferencing can mitigate disruptions to communications and be a central part of disaster recovery planning.

Introduction

In today's economic climate, any downtime affecting critical business systems can cause irreparable damage to a company's productivity, reputation and revenue. Both SMBs and enterprises have prioritized business continuity and disaster recovery as top technology initiatives over the next 12 months, and 1/3 or more are planning to increase their spending by at least 5% this year.³

Businesses are faced with multiple types of threats that can disrupt internal and external communications. Although pandemics, security breaches, and acts of war receive a lot of media attention, more mundane events such as infrastructure and network system failures are perceived as more likely by IT and business executives.⁴

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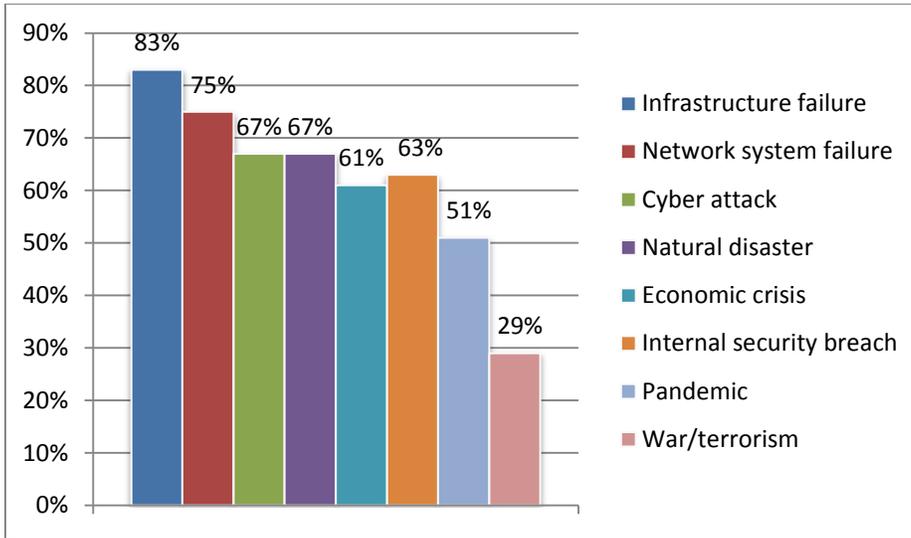
¹ Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

² Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery are Top Priorities for 2010 and 2011, Forrester 2010

³ Ibid

⁴ Business Continuity as Driver of Virtualization, Palmer Research 2010

Table 1: Likelihood of Perceived Threats



Source: Palmer Research 2010

How a business is affected by an event and how it manages those effects will be dependent on the nature of the business, but almost all businesses will need a robust, integrated and well tested multi-platform communications system as part of business continuity planning. Organizations are now exploring how global conferencing solutions can form part of the internal and external communications strategy essential to maintain “business as usual” in the face of disruptive events.

Conferencing solutions can be used to keep in touch and reassure staff, ensuring that consistent messaging is maintained to protect a brand, maintain critical meetings with customers and continue to collaborate on projects.

Leveraging Remote Collaboration Services

Between 2000 and 2008, there have been an average of 392 disasters per year and the average economic damage was \$102.6 billion worldwide.⁵

The cloud of Icelandic volcanic ash which drifted across European flight paths in April 2010 cost firms across Europe up to €2.5 billion⁶ and caused major disruptions to worldwide travel. People found themselves in difficult and sometimes unpleasant situations with limited infrastructure to support them and no visibility of when and how they would return home.

Using conferencing enabled some organizations to mitigate the impact by allowing employees to keep in touch with their colleagues, conduct

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⁵ Center for Research of the Epidemiology of Disasters

⁶ EU transport commissioner Siim Kallas

meetings online and work together on documents. The ash cloud once again highlighted the need for organizations to build internal awareness of how to maintain communications in the face of unforeseen circumstances and moreover highlighted the need for conferencing solutions to be part of an organization's business continuity planning agenda.

Arkadin Case Study



BANYAN TREE

Proactive business continuity communications strategy

Company: Banyan Tree is a leading developer and manager of premium resorts, hotels and spas across the Asia-Pacific region. They have an international management structure, and the board of directors has a very hands-on approach to running the business. Maintaining regular channels of communication with the many remote offices and hotels is viewed as a critical success factor.

Challenge: When constructing new resorts in exquisite yet remote areas, the reliability of communications had negatively impacted project timescales. Also Banyan Tree wanted to establish a robust early warning system which would allow them to automate communication to its resorts due to threats from extreme weather.

Solution: Banyan Tree created an integrated communications strategy to manage design, global marketing and other projects internally using Arkadin Anytime (audio) and Arkadin Anywhere (web) conferencing solutions. By having an effective international communications infrastructure in place, Banyan Tree is proactively positioned to deal with potential disruptions to travel, and to brief staff quickly in required circumstances.

Disruptions such as cancellations or strikes are different from natural 'disasters' in that their impact is short-lived. However the impact of infrequent, short term disruptions can quickly impact productivity, efficiency and customer service.

Preparation for transport cancellations is key. Having a contingency plan in place will prevent the continual drain on resources. Being able to move a planned meeting online at short notice can prevent its cancellation and will enable the delegates to operate efficiently

“Arkadin’s reliability and quality of sound were key influencers in our decision to manage our business continuity procedures and risk management through the Arkadin platform. If one of our hotels is affected by a natural disaster, maintaining communications with that business is a top priority. We have preset features within our conferencing system to roll out our set emergency procedures and respond to the issue quickly.”

- Michael Lee, CIO Banyan Tree

“Being able to move a planned meeting online at short notice can prevent its cancellation and will enable the delegates to operate efficiently regardless of their location.”

regardless of their location. Even if the meeting is external, having a conferencing platform which allows participants to join quickly and easily at the ready, will not only prevent missed opportunities but can also demonstrate professional aptitude.

With a best practice communications strategy in place that includes an integrated conferencing platform, businesses can reduce their reliance on public transport and significantly limit their exposure to losses should disruptions occur. Less reliance on transport to and from meetings, especially when travel is difficult, also reduces wasted productivity time for employees and can contribute to a healthier work-life balance.

Three Tips to Reduce the Risk of Travel Disruptions

1. Find a remote conferencing solution which suits the needs of the business. Remote conferencing services should be accessible from any location and integrate both notebook and mobile connectivity, so that people without access to a notebook can still join a voice conference with people who are connected via their computer. For businesses that have minimal day-to-day need for a conferencing system, several ad hoc solutions exist which can be used without an account.
2. Communicate organizational policy on the use of conference calls and encourage employees to share numbers with key customers and suppliers. Making sure employees know in advance the correct procedure for dealing with travel disruption will minimize the time taken to adapt.
3. Ensure all employees have conference call numbers and access codes on mobile phones and notebooks, and that the organization's contacts database is up-to-date with mobile phone numbers and alternative contact details. Many smart phones have the capability to synchronize automatically with a business' contact database.

Despite proactive planning, businesses will always face the risk of power interruptions or other infrastructure failures. Having a comprehensive communications solution in place that does not rely on a business's native IT infrastructure means that IT downtime doesn't have to be business downtime. Deploying cloud-based conferencing and telephony solutions as part of a comprehensive disaster recovery plan ensures that power cuts and server failures will not prevent people from maintaining communications with customers, partners, suppliers and other key stakeholders.

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Business Continuity Best Practices

Companies are facing increasing pressure from partners, customers, and governmental agencies to comply with standards for disaster recovery planning. In a survey conducted by AT&T, nearly 75% of IT executives indicated that business continuity is a priority for their organizations.⁷ On average, 6 - 7% of IT budgets will be allocated to support business continuity activities in 2011.⁸

“Nearly 75% of IT executives indicated that business continuity is a priority for their organizations.”

Table 1: Top Trends in Business Continuity Planning

% Have a Business Continuity Plan	84%
% Investing in New Technologies	80%
% Use or Considering Using Cloud Services	54%

In the event of natural disasters, % have:

Email or text messaging to reach employees outside of work	86%
Special arrangements for communicating with key executives	80%
Systems in place that enable most employees to work from home or remote locations	80%
Mobile devices play a role in continuity plans	78%

Source: AT&T 2011

Business continuity planning typically consists of three procedural phases: business impact analysis, risk assessment, and plan documentation. Continuity planners and disaster recovery professionals should assess who will be affected by a communications failure and create a plan to mitigate the effects of disruptive events on the organization.

Remote collaborations solutions such as audio, web and video conferencing can be used to:

- Contact and communicate with emergency responders
- Alert employees or the community of an incident
- Rollout emergency procedures
- Maintain communications with employees, suppliers, customers, and partners
- Activate and operate an emergency operations center (EOC)
- Manage and coordinate a crisis response
- Coordinate the restoration of normal operations

⁷ AT&T Business Continuity Study, AT&T 2011

⁸ Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery are Top Priorities for 2010 and 2011, Forrester 2010

Conclusion

Today's competitive business environment means that companies have zero tolerance for downtime whether it be from natural disasters, cyber-attacks, pandemics, or power outages.

Communications is a vital part of business continuity, and solutions must be in place to stave off any potential losses due to loss of or diminished connectivity.

Conferencing solutions are now being used to maintain consistent and timely communications over a range of devices and channels with both internal and external stakeholders. Providing clear guidance on what to do and what the business expects during any disruptive event will minimize the impact on employees and maintain customer relationships and revenues.

An effective business continuity strategy must establish resilient, integrated communication channels. Conferencing solutions are now as essential when it comes contingency planning as they are in everyday business productivity and collaboration.

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About Arkadin

Arkadin is one of the world's leading providers of cloud-based remote collaboration solutions including: audio conferencing, web conferencing, video conferencing and webcasting. Arkadin understands that real-time communication between geographically dispersed co-workers, clients and partners is essential to succeeding in today's global business climate.

Arkadin provides customizable, cost-effective, user-friendly remote collaboration solutions that boost productivity and reduce operating costs. Founded in 2001, Arkadin has more than 14,000 customers worldwide and operates locally in 27 countries with 800+ people throughout Asia, Europe and North America. For more information, please visit www.arkadin.com.

About Palmer Research

Palmer Research designs and executes custom market research studies focused on helping IT decision makers and high tech companies meet their business objectives. Founded in 2001, Palmer Research delivers the data and intelligence clients need to better understand market dynamics, customers, prospects, and partners. The company is located in Los Altos, CA. For more information, call (650) 224-7439 or go to www.palmerresearchgroup.com.

About Debra Chin

Debra joined Palmer Research in 2006 as Senior Vice President. Her background includes executive level marketing and research positions for companies in the high tech, telecommunications, and consumer packaged goods industries. She holds an MBA from Columbia Business School and a BSE in Economics from the Wharton School of Business.