

The Bare Essentials

by Brian Turley, President, Strohl Systems Group, Inc.

The business continuity plan (BCP) begins with analyzing your vulnerabilities and weakness—where and how are you most likely to suffer a loss of service and how will it affect the bottomline. This examination of your business is called the business impact analysis or BIA.

Most BIAs start with a questionnaire distributed to managers, departmental or business unit decision makers, and essential personnel—like folks responsible for critical infrastructure, supply chain, and information technology.

When establishing a business continuity planning team, it is *imperative* that each operating unit assigns a business coordinator and department level participants to assist the BCP team. This coordinator can be designated to assist during the plan-building phase.

Your BIA questionnaire should begin with something simple and familiar, such as describing the functions of their department.

When building your BIA, it is important to consider *any* and *all* potential area of business disruption, including a terrorist attack. You may consider some of the following when conducting your BIA:

- Estimating the likelihood of damage at your business facility, either by direct effects of by an impact of damage at a nearby facility
- The likely impact that damage to a vendor's facility may have on your ability to conduct business
- The possibility of regional disasters or service

interruptions at or near your facility that can disrupt you business

- Making plans for and installing sufficient protective measures to minimize damage to your business facility and personnel
- Production factors such as the criticality of the product, exclusiveness of the environment in which the product is produced, where facility is located, and stockpiled material on hand



Since your crisis recovery plan is only as good as your BIA, it is extremely helpful to use a specialized tool to facilitate a better, more precise BIA. Software that helps design, organize, and analyze your BIA results can be especially beneficial. A particularly powerful tool can make the process less time consuming, as it practically guarantees that results meet your expected outcome and presents findings in a form appropriate for distribution to senior management.

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Building Your Plan

Once your BIA is completed and *all* your potential vulnerabilities noted, it is time to create your plan. Your business continuity plan is your strategy to reduce or respond to crises. Most plans begin with a thorough review of your BIA followed by a prioritization of potential threats. For example, if a major snowstorm hits your area and highways are shut down, what steps will you take to reduce your business impact and what procedures will you enact to restart or reroute your lines of service? If employees can't get in, who will man the

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phones, take the orders, and reassure your customer base? What if you have no phone service, inventory tracking, or communications lines? Basically, what measures will you take to circumvent the effects of each threat?

It is important to keep in mind that contingencies based on work-around procedures are worthless unless you have the organization and vital resources needed to maintain your BCP information and business flow. More importantly your vital information (personnel, infrastructure, IT, etc) needs to be accurately accounted for and coordinated for availability when you need them. This is where your planning effort will rely heavily on quality BCP teams and management.

Team building is one of the most important components in developing a plan. While a team's importance remains constant from company to company, every organization is different in the number, type, and composition of its teams.

Continuity teams are usually developed on three levels and are commonly as follows:

- Management teams as Crisis, Business Continuity, Business Operations, Support, Technology
- Support teams of areas such as Facilities, Security, Purchasing, Human Resources
- Technology teams consisting of areas such as Computer Operations, Telecommunications, Mainframe, Midrange, and LAN/WAN

With all that goes into a BCP, it's no wonder many companies rely on professional BCP consultants and specialized software to assist in compiling and organizing their BCP information. Software tools can be especially helpful as they start you out a step ahead. Some BCP software will walk the user through the

planning process, saving businesses time and money. Software, with a relational database, will also automate a plan, making updates and maintenance easier and less time-consuming. And since company environments are changing constantly, it is nice to know that some tools make it especially easy to update your plans—not completely redo them.

Put to the Test

Once your BIA is completed and your plans built, it will be time to put your work to the test. Many experts and practitioners in the business continuity industry consider testing the most important facet of any BCP effort. Without properly testing your BCP you will never know if it works when you need it most. You won't want to discover that you missed something when building your plan in a recovery or crisis situation.

As seen demonstrated by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, a well developed, maintained, and tested business continuity plan can go along way in safeguarding your business.

Taking the time to apply and follow through with a few simple yet vital steps is not only an added defense against disaster but it can also save the life of your business.

About the Author

Brian Turley is President for Strohl Systems Group, Inc. (www.strohlsystems.com). Turley has traveled extensively to work on BCP projects throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. He is a frequent lecturer and has been with Strohl Systems for five years. Strohl Systems produces the world's leading crisis planning and disaster recovery software. Along with its world-class consulting, Strohl Systems products and services help to protect billions of global-market assets everyday.