SCRAPPY BUSINESS CONTINGENCY PLANNING ™

How to Bullet-Proof Your Business and Laugh at Volcanoes, Tornadoes, Locust Plagues, and Hard Drive Crashes

SCRAPPY ABOUT

MICHAEL SEESE

"Scrappy Business Contingency Planning"
Book Excerpt

How to Bullet-Proof Your Business and Laugh at Volcanoes, Tornadoes, Locust Plagues, and Hard Drive Crashes

By Michael Seese

SCRAPPY ABOUT

BOOK EXCERPT Table of Contents

- Preface
- Kick Off
- Scrappy BCP Checklists
- Chapter 1: What Is BCP?
- Chapter 2: The Power of Negative Thinking
- About the Author
- Getting the book and other books from Happy About

C o n t e n t s

NOTE: This is the Table of Contents (TOC) from the book for your reference. The eBook TOC (below) differs in page count from the tradebook TOC.

Preface

"One of the true tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency."
- Arnold H. Glasgow

When I first heard about the field of business contingency planning—BCP—I said to my wife, "This is the perfect career for me. It's an opportunity to put my obsessive-compulsive disorder to good use." I was joking, of course. But there was a kernel of truth to my quip. Business contingency planning (BCP) is about thinking of everything that could go wrong, and then developing a planned response just in case it actually happens. Only someone blessed (or cursed) with a mind that churns will think through the details and ramifications of every possibility. As an example, you might think that placing your contingency plans on employees' laptop computers would eliminate the need for printed copies. But what if the disaster *du jour* is a widespread power outage, and there is no electricity for printers? Would you really expect your employees to memorize or hand-write documents that could range from 50 pages or more? Probably not. Or maybe they could just carry around their laptops as they race to execute the plans before the batteries die. At least the light from the computer screen would make up for a lack of flashlights.

This example illustrates the power of negative thinking. Only someone who worries too much would think of that one!

Most of us have jobs with a varying degree of what I call the "drone" factor: you go to work, sit at a desk, and type type type or file file file so that you can make the corporation money. Bear in mind, there is nothing wrong with that. But if you are involved in your organization's contingency planning efforts, you are doing a great deal more. You are helping to ensure the viability of your employer in the face of a catastrophic event. It is not an exaggeration to say that a disaster could drive the guy across the street—who failed to plan—out of business. But your employer—having a solid BCP program—will live, allowing you to type type type or file file file (thereby getting paid paid paid) another day.

I'll stress throughout this book that BCP is about *planning*. I personally think that many of us could benefit from a refresher course on good planning principles as we prepare our home disaster kits, or even as we book our next vacation.

Each of us faces countless problems and inconveniences—most of them minor, of course—on a daily basis. As you deal with your daily disasters, keep in mind what I like to think of as one of the central tenets of planning, period:

Focus on the loss, not the event!

Consider all of the things that could go wrong as you try to race to work on time:

- You could run out of gas.

- You could get a flat tire.

- You could get caught in traffic.

- You could get stuck at a railroad crossing.

- You could…

Well, actually, you could go crazy just trying to come up with an all-inclusive list. So instead of worrying about the thousand "ifs," focus on the loss—in this case, your loss of a timely arrival—and how to deal with that.

Read on and learn how to cope...

Kick Off

"Expect the best, plan for the worst, and prepare to be surprised."
- Denis Waitley

I first got the idea to write this book while on a business and pleasure trip to San Francisco. Returning to the hotel after the first day of the conference, my wife lamented our lack of an internet-connected computer, which would have eased the task of finding sources of entertainment for our active two-year-old. Fortunately, we were able to fall back on more prehistoric methods: we talked with some local folks, and we used the telephone. OK, I'll admit that I also called a friend and asked him to search the web to glean some information for us.

The approach I used to find sources of amusement for our toddler is one of the tenets of contingency planning. If you think hard enough, you will find one or more alternatives to whatever is puzzling you. Each alternative presents its own challenges, and typically is less efficient than your normal routine. That's why they're called "backup" plans, rather than standard operating procedures. But they do the job. And sometimes the alternatives suggest a whole new way of doing things in your normal process.

The technique of stepping back and considering how things were done in the past, so-called "retro" processes, is often overlooked while contemplating solutions. When trying to think of strategies to keep a business running in a time of crisis, you may find the answer by recalling how you used to get things done in the "Dark Ages," before Al Gore invented the Internet. After all, commerce did take place before email, faxes, and telephones. It may not have been as efficient or productive, but it happened. Of course, not every business can roll back the clock. An automated manufacturing firm would be hard-pressed to put a wrench in a worker's hand and say, "Have at it!" But, many organizations could limp along temporarily using 20th century methods until the power comes back on. The moral of the story? When developing your contingency plans, focus on the technology-based alternates, but don't overlook the manual ones. Consider that NASA developed a fancy ink pen that could write reliably in zero gravity, while the Soviets got by just fine using a pencil.

Scrappy BCP Checklists

Although later in the book I somewhat "pooh-pooh" the idea of simply checking items off a to-do list, the fact is that there are certain steps which must be followed when developing a business contingency program and plans. Below are two lists which you can use for handy reference.

Business Contingency Program Steps

- ☐ Identify Assets

- ☐ Rate System/Application/Data Criticality

- ☐ Determine System/Application/
  Data Recovery Order

- ☐ Determine the "Pain" Threshold

- ☐ Determine Existing Vulnerabilities

- ☐ Examine Potential Threats

- ☐ Evaluate Countermeasures

- ☐ Review Audits

- ☐ Focus on the Loss, Not the Event

- ☐ Research and Establish Backup Storage Alternatives

- ☐ Research and Establish Recovery Alternatives

- ☐ Establish Lines of Succession

- ☐ Establish Disaster Criteria

- ☐ Establish Disaster Declaration Criteria

- ☐ Establish Relationships with Local Emergency Services

- ☐ Develop Communications Plans

- ☐ Establish Business Contingency Plan Distribution Strategy

- ☐ Establish Return-to-Normal Criteria

Business Contingency Plan Steps

- ☐ Catalog Personnel Information

- ☐ Catalog Job Functions

- ☐ Catalog Business Processes

- ☐ Draft Detailed Standard Operating Procedures

- ☐ Catalog Equipment Requirements

- ☐ Develop Manual Procedures

- ☐ Establish Call Trees

- ☐ Cross-Train Job Functions

1 | What Is BCP?

"What, me worry?"
- Alfred E. Neuman

Any business, be it a manufacturer or a service provider, sells its customers what they think they want and need. The bold ones—innovators or just plucky hopefuls—create something new, and then convince us that we can't live without it. Technology does the same thing for corporations. Twenty years ago, no one had heard of BCP. Today, no sensible business dares to live without it.

But, what is BCP? A colleague and I discussed what we should call this profession of ours, this business of thinking about and preparing for "bad things." Although BCP is commonly known as business *continuity* planning, that "de-acronym," we agreed, focuses too much on continuing—on "business as usual"—in the face of disruption and disaster. Instead, we felt that business *contingency* planning captures the spirit of the profession much more completely.

When presenting a "BCP Basics" seminar, I always ask the audience, "What is BCP?" After hearing their fast and furious (OK, usually slow and grudging) answers, I offer mine:

- Risk analysis
- Emergency response
- Event evaluation
- Business relocation
- Business resumption
- Continuity of operations
- Restoration and recovery
- "Return to normal," bearing in mind that the new normal might seem rather abnormal at first

As you can see, continuing operations is only a small part of the effort, and fails to take into account many of the absolutely critical steps outlined above, such as evaluating the situation, reviewing alternatives, restoring operations, and returning to normal. But if you call it business *contingency* planning, you are planning for any contingency, small or large, mundane or sensational.

The bottom line is that you are trying to prepare your organization to withstand an unlikely, though not unpredictable or unexpected, event—something that "can't happen here." A *really good* business contingency plan will help you not only weather an event that can't happen here, but even continue to delight your customers and make a profit.

2 The Power of Negative Thinking

"Accidents will happen
We only hit and run."
- Declan Patrick MacManus a.k.a. Elvis Costello

Aside from the terrible human loss, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 served as a horrifying reminder that an unimaginable event can cause unimaginable repercussions. The destruction of the World Trade Center meant that businesses based there lost their physical center of operations as well as the unfortunate people who died there. But the ripple effect extended far beyond the enterprises housed in the towers.

The buildings' collapse damaged a telephone-switching station in Lower Manhattan and disrupted communications throughout the city. The Port Authority Trans-Hudsonline (PATH) subway station below the World Trade Center was completely destroyed. Before the attacks, about 67,000 riders passed through the

station daily.[1] Almost 600 feet of the tunnel surrounding subway lines 1 and 9 caved in, and the damage was so severe that more than 6,000 feet of line required complete reconstruction.[2]

But on September 10 I doubt anyone gave even the remotest thought to what would happen if it all came crashing down.

In the somber days and weeks after the attacks enterprises located in high-risk areas—major American cities like my hometown, Cleveland, for example—were suddenly scurrying about updating, or creating, plans to continue operations in the event of another attack. One of the fears was that the next strike would be a bombing—chemical, biological, or radiological—which could render a city uninhabitable. Federal funding was provided to local governments in high-risk areas to help governments and corporations prepare for events that previously had been completely unthinkable to ordinary citizens.

The upside was that the federal government's efforts benefited municipalities that were able to secure federal aid. The downside was that many local governments did not receive any federal funds. They had just as much motivation to plan, but their budgets did not have the capacity to remodel the local school, let alone fund a doom-and-gloom response program. So they opted for schools over disaster planning.

Fortunately, there have not been further attacks...yet. (What can I say; I have terrific powers of negative thinking!) Those without a planned response have continued as before, and without spending the time or money to create a BCP program. However, they probably also adopted a dangerous collective mentality. In some sense they've been rewarded for their lack of planning because nothing bad happened. But human beings are notoriously poor judges of probability. Thinking "What? Me worry?" is dangerous. Saying "It can't happen here" is dangerous. Because it can.

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1. Moore, M. "Quiet Since 9/11, Subway To WTC Resumes Sunday." USA Today. 2003. Downloaded 11/17/2007 from
   http://www.usatoday.com/news/sept11/2003-11-19-wtc-subway_x.htm
2. Kennedy, R. "Subway At Trade Center To Take Years To Rebuild." The New York Times. 2001. Downloaded 11/17/2007 from **http://bit.ly/c0lk8B**
   (query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9805E5DE1F3AF93BA1575AC0A 9679C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1)

Any government or corporate chieftain, or normal everyday Joe, who believes that his anonymous location in Middle Town America is not a potential terrorist target should take a look around and ask:

- Is there a chemical plant or oil refinery in the area?

- Is the facility located downstream from a dam? Destroying a dam certainly would be a daunting task, but one which would be a home run for a terrorist.

- Is there a military facility, such as a National Guard armory, nearby? If not a target, any military site could experience an accident involving munitions. Try not to think about the August 2007 snafu at Minot Air Force Base, where personnel there lost track of six nuclear missiles. Whoops! Don't worry; they were found at another air force base.[3] And people think airport baggage handlers are good at losing things.

- Are there *any* government buildings nearby? Prior to April 19, 1995, most people in Oklahoma City viewed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building as just another office.

This sort of analysis, leveraging the power of negative thinking, is necessary to overcome the all-too-prevalent "it can't happen here" mentality. But even if you could say that your facility has no potential targets nearby, a truly skilled negative thinker could imagine an almost infinite number of disasters—large and small, natural or manmade—that could affect your operations. Let me illustrate with another provocative question culled from one of my "BCP Basics" talks.

"We all know about 9/11, but what about 11/12/2001?" I ask

"11/12/2001? What happened on 11/12/2001?" someone in the puzzled, and otherwise silent, audience asks.

That was the day American Airlines flight 587 crashed into a Queens neighborhood shortly after takeoff, killing 260, including almost a dozen people on the ground. Although the initial investigation focused

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3. Hoffman, M. "Nuclear Safety Slipped For Years Before Minot." Air Force Times. 2008. Downloaded 11/20/2008 from
   http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/02/airforce_250208_nukesafety/

on a terrorist act, authorities later determined that the crash was caused by the first officer's aggressive maneuvers in response to the turbulence coming from the wake of a nearby aircraft.[4]

The moral of this story is that planes sometimes simply fall out of the sky. (Thankfully, not often!) But these kinds of things do happen. And they *can* happen "here." If a calamitous event never happens to you, be grateful. If it does, be prepared.

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4. Downloaded 12/29/2007 from
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Airlines_Flight_587

About the Author

Michael Seese, CISSP, CIPP, is an information security, privacy, and business contingency professional in beautiful Chagrin Falls, Ohio. He holds a Master of Science in information security, which was earned completely online via a very cool synchronous and interactive curriculum, and a Master of Arts in psychology, which tends to scare people. He began his career as a journalist, and then moved into technical writing, which piqued an interest in programming, which after all is nothing more than another form of writing, using a more limited and concise language. Then one day, standing in a local bookstore and surrounded on three sides by programming books, covering C++ and C-sharp and .NET and ASP, he had an epiphany: programming languages come and go. Guess wrong—that is, specialize in the flavor-of-the-last-month—and some college fresh-out will take your job, and probably do it

better. But the need to store data and protect data will remain and, in fact, grow. That realization led to his current career track.

Michael regularly speaks at conferences, has had numerous articles published in professional journals, and contributed two chapters to the *2008 PSI Handbook Of Business Security*. He is the co-author of *Haunting Valley*, a compilation of ghost stories from the Chagrin Valley. Michael also penned (or, better said, e-penned) this book's companion tome, *Scrappy Information Security*. He currently spends his limited spare time rasslin' with three young'uns, and can be reached between matches at **scrappy@MichaelSeese.com**.

Getting "Scrappy Business Contingency Planning" (http://www.happyabout.com/scrappyabout/scrappy-bcp.php)

Scrappy Business Contingency Planning can be purchased as an eBook for $14.95 or tradebook for $19.95 at
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  http://www.happyabout.com/thinkaha/qualitytweet01.php

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1. www.happyabout.com/scrappyabout/scrappywomeninbusiness.php
2. www.happyabout.com/scrappyabout/scrappy-general-management.php
3. www.happyabout.com/synopsyspress/10commandmentseffective
   standards.php

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"If I was going to undertake the challenge of developing and maintaining a truly effective business contingency program, I can't imagine a more practical and useful guide than Michael's *Scrappy BCP* book."
Jack Jones, Founder and President of Risk Management Insight

"*Scrappy BCP* gets right down to business in helping the reader create a comprehensive continuity plan for their company, large or small."
Lisa Orloff, Founder and Executive Director, World Cares Center

"I really liked it! The majority of books/articles are rather dry. This was compelling, with some light humor. It certainly kept my attention and kept me reading!"
Cheyene Haase, President, BC Management, Inc.

"Every successful business manager, regardless of the size of the business or what stage it is in, needs to read *Scrappy Business Contingency Planning*. After all, disasters matter only to successful businesses; if your business is already a disaster, you don't need to worry about planning for one."
Will Luden, Past CEO of InfoPartners (purchased by Compushare)

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