

Feature Article

The Growing Awareness of Business Continuity Planning (BCP) in the GCC

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Before early 2011 most companies and organisations in Bahrain and the wider GCC paid very little attention to the words Business Continuity (BC) and Disaster Recovery (DR) Management. Unless required by legislators such as the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) it would be very unlikely for an organisation to have a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) in place. Few saw the need for them as 'the Middle East does not have tornados, earthquakes or floods' and little thought was given to the more common events such as fires or electrical brown outs.

But in the January and February of 2011 that all changed. Having fared relatively well throughout the financial storm that had affected most countries worldwide, Bahrain was about to be hit by another very different 'disaster' scenario, political unrest. With protests taking place all over the island and organised demonstrations causing significant disruption and worry to those looking in, organisations had to find ways to continue to function with lower staffing levels, lost revenue, unreliable communication channels and many other disruptive influences. For those proactive enough and in many cases lucky enough to have one, organisations had to activate their BC Plans and their IT DR Plans. Many other companies took a significant hit during this period of business interruption from which some have never recovered.

On the April 9th 2013 Bahrain felt another shakeup, in some cases quite literally, as the Bushehr earthquake hit Iran with aftershocks being felt widely across the island. Prior to that the common belief was that Bahrain is not effected by earthquakes, which to some extent may have been true, but this event still proved 'shockwaves' can have an effect from a great distance. In the case of an earthquake it is also widely accepted that earthquake waves are felt more significantly on reclaimed land and in tall buildings, of which for a small island Bahrain has its fair share. As is evident with this event and in fact most disasters, they usually have no warning and can often hit you when you least expect it.

Other recent high rise building disasters such as the fires at the Address and the Torch Tower in Dubai and similar others around the GCC should also be a wakeup call to organisations. If vital records or critical resources have been

left behind in such an evacuation without any appropriate back up then that may be all it takes to ensure a company is not able to rebuild quickly enough to minimise losses in revenue or brand reputation. The need for Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans is also increasing due to the greater reliance by most companies and organisations on newer technologies and of course the internet, which places less reliance on manual processes and in turn more room for the unexpected.

Research out of the UK shows an organisation with a plan suffers significantly less financial losses and can often recover up to fifteen times quicker than organisations without a plan. The reality is that as far as many businesses in other countries are concerned, having a BC Plan in place is part of doing normal business and as important as having insurance. In some countries such as Saudi Arabia it has actually become regulation to have a BCP in place before certain business interruption insurance can be obtained.

As a general rule, Bahrain's financial industries, banks, insurance companies etc. now have good plans and strategies in place through the regulatory efforts of the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB). There is also a growing awareness coming through the GCC for other business sectors who wish to work internationally, or are seen as critical suppliers locally, to ensure they have a plan in place to deal with the unexpected. It is not now uncommon for an organisation bidding for work with a potential client to be asked to produce their BCP. New legislation in the UAE has in fact seen most companies bidding for government work having to ensure there is a BCP in place.

Within the ever evolving landscape of doing business in the GCC, it is becoming ever more apparent that we no longer have the same control over our own fate as we once did. This control is lost through the increasing reliance on newer technologies, applications, subcontractors and 3rd party suppliers, as well as the seemingly decreasing stability of the environment around us. But as a wise man once said 'you make your own luck' and though we cannot control everything around us we can certainly help by creating an effective, resilient and documented strategy, helping to ensure that we minimise any risk and are also able to piece everything back together as quickly and cost effectively as possible if the unexpected ever strikes.

