

Business continuity is seen increasingly as an asset alongside marketing, procurement or management, where excellence delivers value. It has the potential to do this in three important ways:

- Competitively, and as a business pre-requisite for customers who demand the highest levels of service under all circumstances.
- Commercially, to the extent where in some service organisations' continuity is revenue-generative, as they sell on their enhanced capability.
- Fuelling growth, by fulfilling governance obligations to stakeholders and investors, providing the certainty they need to fund expansion.

These represent continuity's Holy Grail; achievable, but with two significant obstacles to overcome.

First, in some organisations, continuity is seen as a drain on resources, a frustrating game of catch-up vulnerable to delay, oversight and under-funding. This particularly affects complex or global entities, where change is constant and where keeping abreast of multiple overlapping situations is a full-time activity. In cases like this it takes a responsive, mobile and multi-skilled team to keep all risks on the radar and manage them effectively as they develop; it's a major commitment and expensive to carry out. However, cutting team size means continuity data can become dilute, outdated and unable to support the value points above, negating any benefits.

Second, is that continuity capex runs to 0.5% of turnover in some corporates, as they apply and re-apply best practice in a fast evolving environment. This can mean replication and protection of multiple information assets, buildings, equipment, skills and so on. Pitching continuity incorrectly can be expensive, and faced with constant change and uncertain decision data, there are two probable outcomes. The first is under-funding; often an easier decision as continuity spend potentially dilutes profits, dividends and bonuses, but one which leaves business unacceptably exposed. The second is over-spend and is more prevalent in risk-averse cultures, where belt-and-braces attempts are made to cover off all areas of uncertainty. Neither is desirable.



In each case, information starvation prevents us realising continuity's potential value. To get it right, we need to balance continuity capability against the organisation's appetite for continuity risk, and we can only do this using hard, relevant data.

An enterprise-wide business continuity management information system (MIS) offers the potential to reduce costs and improve performance. An MIS should deliver assessment against a continuity standard using a proven framework, defining a basis for convergence across the organisation. It should allow us to set targets and define profiles for each scale and type of operation. Collected data should be balanced, relevant and comparable, so we can easily identify exceptions. Some specific benefits of this include:

- Alignment of continuity capability with need on a real-time global basis, ensuring governance is satisfied at minimum cost.
- Devolved responsibility and workload, giving management at every level the potential to become accountable for continuity at minimum effort and cost.
- Delivering commercial advantage by out-performing competitors in this increasingly critical area.
- Providing executives and continuity specialists with tools, insight, and the ability to respond to the global condition at any time.
- Extension of the MIS into other related areas, adding value for Information Security, Operational Risk, Audit and Compliance.

To conclude, many organisations appear to starve themselves of continuity-related information, a valuable commercial asset. Real-time business continuity MIS offers to correct this condition, providing foresight, vision and control. With this comes the promise of tangible benefit through increased investment, improved returns and better governance. It represents an opportunity that cannot reasonably be ignored.

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