

# Tales from the Front: Business Continuity Planning: Solutions & Practice

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One of the many benefits of working at a university is the perpetual access to talented members of the faculty and their students who are capable and willing to help address challenges confronting departments within the institution.

## An Economical Solution

It was time for the university to put into place a continuity of operations or business continuity plan, but our department's funding was inadequate to purchase an off-the-shelf application to assist us in writing the plan. The idea emerged to build a continuity plan database in-house. At the same time, Carlos Romero, a student employee in the Office of Risk Management Services, talked to me about the department's needs, exploring the possibility of finding a senior project that would benefit the department. Romero explained that he and three other students from the College of Business Administration's Management Information Systems program needed to complete such a project as part of their graduation requirements. Seizing the opportunity to use free talent and energy, I proposed the BCP development project to the students and they eagerly accepted. The department, suddenly enlarged by the presence of four students who had found a new, on-campus base of operations, then began a nine-month journey of turning ideas into flow charts, programming language and a product that was a usable solution to the department's challenges.

## Realistic Expectations

We spent the first four months conceptually designing the database. During the final five months of the project we developed a Microsoft SQL (structured query language) database for storing continuity of operations planning information and combined it with a web interface for departmental user data entry.

The team considered the construction of the interface and database from the viewpoint of user data entry—and factored in the time constraints (primarily that of student graduation) that limited the scope of the project. Consequently, the project team agreed that the solution to our BCP development challenge was to attack the heart of continuity planning — critical processes and procedures development.

With constraints understood and the ability to reference critical system information previously identified in our BCP business impact analyses. The team was given a few basic system design requirements, which included:

- Enabling system users to document a department's critical system(s);
- Enabling users to identify all of the resources, responders, and supporting documents needed in a critical situation;
- Providing a data entry structure that would allow the user to develop step-by-step procedures for each critical function that might need restoration,
- Applying worse case scenarios to the way that data would be captured and handled within the database;
- Creating a data management process to correlate responders, resources, and supporting documents with the response procedures; and
- Assembling all of the entered components into a single, coherent document that would be easily understood by any member of a department using it.

## A Successful Outcome

In the few short years since implementing our homegrown continuity planning application, it has proven to be a robust and reliable partner in the university's continuity planning efforts. They system's straightforward logic enables managers at every level to clearly state their business resumption needs, list priorities of actions, equipment or supplies needed, and to develop related procedures essential for maintaining continuity of operations during and following an unfavorable event.

In addition to Sacramento State, other universities and state organizations have obtained free copies of the software and taken advantage of the clear and logical way the Business Continuity Planner assists them in assembling plans relevant to their operational needs.

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