

Why sticking to a standard is so important

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Having been involved in disaster management and subsequently business continuity management for the past 30 years I am convinced that one of the most positive and significant developments in the discipline of Business Continuity Management has without doubt been the creation of the British Standard in Business Continuity Management BS25999.

Now let me also say straight away that it is not the perfect standard and certain parts of it I personally disagree with. However, it is in place and, in my view, far and away better than anything else around at the moment. It is also a developing standard with PD's (Public Documents) being developed to improve and clarify several of its objectives. I will admit to a personal bias here as I sit on the BSI committee creating PD25222 a supplementary guidance document in support of BS25999 which will attempt to provide guidance for both the "customer" and "supplier" in the supply-chain.

It is disappointing therefore to find that despite the large amount of publicity and marketing by the BSI at and since the launch of this standard, which has resulted in it being one of their biggest selling standards with global sales, that so many Business Continuity managers continue to ignore it or at best pay it lip service, and I firmly believe to their cost.

The following is a true example of a recent personal experience of this.

One of the many hats I wear is that of a District Councillor and in this role from time to time I can be invited to review tenders from 3rd party suppliers placed before the council covering a variety of services. A few days into this New Year I was involved in such a review. The service I was looking at and the companies who provided tenders need to remain confidential however a general observation of their submissions I am able to discuss.

All had included as part of the tender documentation a Business Continuity plan. Naturally I was delighted to see this as with the council being classed as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 I viewed the inclusion of such plans as an essential.

I was dismayed then as I reviewed these plans at their quality and in places their relevance. They varied greatly in length and content with very few referring to RTO's and RPO's and only one referring directly to MTPD. This plan however shone through the other dark materials and clearly complied with BS25999 adding as it did to the overall quality of the associated tender.

There is, and not just in local authorities, a growing expectation for tenders, no matter what service being sought, to have included within them Business Continuity plans which in turn demonstrates to any potential client good business practice.

It is essential that the quality of such plans is of the highest order to promote the tender and the business in the best possible way. Having Business Continuity plans which comply with BS25999 is a simple but excellent way of doing just this.