

ITES EQUIP THEMSELVES TO COUNTER DISASTER

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Firms give top priority to safety of employees and clients business continuity

New Delhi, India's capital city, woke up on November 26 after mild tremors hit the metropolis and its adjacent city Gurgaon. The quake measuring 4.3 on the Richter Scale had its epicenter about 10-kms from Bahadurgarh, a small town in Haryana, not far away from the IT city Gurgaon.

In a country, where natural calamities such as earthquakes and floods and also man-made calamities such as bomb blasts have become the order-of-the-day, CyberMedia News took a reality check on how some of the BPO's have geared themselves.

Interestingly, some of the IT / ITeS firms have adopted innovative models not only to secure the safety of their employees but also that of their clients' business continuity.

Vardhman Jain, managing director, Insurance & Business Process Solutions- (India& Manila) at Perot Systems informed that the company has a formal enterprise wide Business Continuity Planning and Disaster Recovery (BCP/DR) program. "We have an Information Security Manager who is in charge of the DCP/DR program and all activities relating to this," he said.

"Safety of our employees is our primary concern. We have floor marshals on each floor for each facility. The Floor Marshals are trained to handle such situation and to lead our associates to safety. Periodic drills are conducted to ensure the process is being followed and to ensure the replication," Jain informed.

Focus on data security

As for data security, which is vital for proper functioning Perot has a system of taking daily back-ups and store the same in different mirror sites. This is over and above the regular tape back-ups, which are taken and stored in vaults.

"Regular audits are performed as a part of our information security certification program (ISO 27000:2005). If a particular facility is affected, other locations act as back-up centers to ensure business is as normal," he adds.

When contacted, S. Nagarajan, chief people officer, 24/7 Customer, which has operations across India said that the company has a special Emergency Response Team formulated in any case of natural calamity / disaster, public inconveniences like bandhs etc. The Team is responsible to train the employees on how to react during emergency by frequent drills and evacuate them in case of such situations safely.

"At 24/7 we have provided two levels of security. The building/software park authorities provide the first level and the second level is at the 24/7 campus premises, itself. Physical security is primarily responsible to regulate the movement of men, material and vehicles. We have on an average 60 security personnel, including building security and transport, including the security officers.

"In case of any untoward incident, they are reported and escalated immediately. Our administration staff is well staffed with the Head of administration being an ex army personnel.

Also we have separate team for physical security and another for security systems," he said. Nagarajan said that in order to guarantee that such unprecedented situations do not affect our client's work, the company ensures that the official business calls get routed to a different center through the Business security system.

Another outsourcing firm – Intelenet has a dedicated team for Business Continuity Planning. This team ensures that there is sound disaster recovery/business continuity, which is essential to protect the well being of Intelenet and its employees. There is also a separate yearly budget allocated for Business Continuity Planning Team.

In the wake of 26/7 when the Mumbai floods happened, Intelenet took precautionary measures by invoking its Business Continuity Plan for their clients.

"As a part of a cautionary measures taken towards employee safety and facilities resilience, on 13th June 2005, we had circulated within Intelenet High Tide Dates shared by the Disaster Management Cell, Mumbai and a list of low lying areas and common failure points in the various Railway Lines. Our Business Continuity Team constantly liaises with various Government bodies on these issues. Again on 21st July 2005, we communicated in all our Mumbai facilities the warning issued by the BMC for Heavy Rains around the 25th of July. Operations leaders had at conservative levels appropriately fostered the staff for these dates," said a communiqué from Intelenet.

Moreover, Intelenet's Emergency Management Team met up frequently to assess the situation and give appropriate direction to staff. These measures also included a senior management member being designated as Officer on Special Duty (OSD), who was available round-the-clock, providing reassurance and direction to the staff.

"All critical functions like Operations, Facilities Management, Transport and Technology and Telecom team were present on site for 36-48 hours. There was a fine display of our Intelenet values like customer centricity, enthusiasm and teamwork amongst co-workers in the moment of crisis," the communiqué added.

As a pre-disaster exercise, the company ensured that all Critical Processes applicable to each client and staffing schedules were prepared accordingly. "Our 'Near and Far' lists were activated riding on the back of the 'Calling Trees' which we keep testing at a process level in BAU conditions. However, we also realized that it was important to document from the time of recruitment, residence and wired telephone numbers of our staff. This is due to the fact that GSM and CDMA connectivity was fluctuating very heavily. The employees were constantly updated with news reports from the media and the company also set-up a 'Mini Inbound Call Center' of sorts for disseminating the information," Intelenet's communiqué further added.

Another ITeS firm based out of Chennai, Ajuba Solutions has a special task force for disaster management. "A cross functional team is trained on various measures to take in case of an emergency or a natural calamity. Members of this team are also trained on administering first aid. Our ISMS team regularly monitors compliance of safety and security regulations to ensure that we are always prepared to handle an emergency situation," T Jagannathan, CTO of Ajuba Solutions India informed.

Though these measures may be part of compliance for clients' business continuity, it does set a mark for other industries to take a cue from what the ITeS industry does – in adding to the GDP of the country but also being socially responsible.

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