

The TMC ADVISOR

The Advisor is a periodical published by TMC containing articles of interest to Canadian Business Professionals

Mar 2021, Vol 8 # 2

“Voicemail Jail”

By Peter Aggus

Do you remember that old term? When Auto Attendant capability first began to replace live switchboard operators, callers hated the idea. While it's no longer a new concept, it is widely implemented and is often the first contact many customers have with your company. The Auto Attendant is part of your brand, your reputation. Is it working *for* or *against* that reputation? How do you find out and fix the damage?



An Emergency Plan in Your Pocket

By Guy Robertson

Emergency Planners and Managers work hard to design emergency response plans to best serve their organizations. The work can drag on and they often need more time to make sure that they do a great job and include everything. Unfortunately, time and money alone do not guarantee good planning or plans that work. Here's a novel way to create a tiny plan that has been proven to save lives in actual emergencies.



What Type of IT Department Are You?

There are 3 kinds of IT departments, find out where you stand:

Run: Keeping the lights on

Grow: Improving existing systems

Transform: Changing the nature of the business

For more information, or to request a free copy of "IT Assessments 123," email: assessment@tmconsulting.ca.



Media Crisis Preparedness

By Maria Colasurdo

The news media has a clearly defined understanding of what counts as news: a major crime, a major disaster or a major crisis. A crisis occurs when the reputation of an organization is threatened or actually harmed by bad press. Nasty stories can make the public lose confidence in an organization. Those stories can be accurate or inaccurate. It doesn't matter because the damage has been done. Here's our advice on how to be proactive.



Power Outage Preparedness

By Ellen Koskinen-Dodgson

Climate Change and COVID-19 are each causing changes in electricity demand and service availability. BC Hydro reported that climate change-caused storms that cause power outages have tripled since 2013. Wildfire numbers have also soared. 2020 brought Covid-19 and the drive to work from home. All of this has affected electrical delivery and increased the need for power outage preparedness.



“Voicemail Jail” By Peter Aggus

Do you remember that old term? When Auto Attendant capability first began to replace live switchboard operators, callers hated the idea. While it's no longer a new concept, it is widely implemented and is often the first contact many customers have with your company. The Auto Attendant is part of your brand, your reputation



Telephony is Obsolete?

Many CIOs likely regard their phone systems as 'old hat' technology and something to simply 'keep running'. Yet the humble telephone is still the way that many customers choose to communicate. Your web site may be more useful than the old Yellow Pages listing but don't force customers to use enquiry forms if they want to talk.

Nowadays, the 'face at the door' has gone and the phones are answered by an automated system. That way, customers direct their own calls to the correct destination. Great system?

That depends on how it is built and whether you are asking from the viewpoint of staff cost savings or improved customer service. Savings are obvious—so let's look at service.

Are Customers Prime?

Another query. They certainly should be—we learn that on management courses. Yet do we follow this directive?

The big issue is that the Telecom or IT experts often design from the inside out. Your expert may well be proud of the 28 page IVR tree that adorns his wall, yet be unable to understand why customers have problems getting to the right department. Callers could not get the 'X-Ray Department'. The problem:



the IVR tree used the name on the door, which these days says 'Medical Imaging'. The simple fix: **acknowledge the customer** and add 'X-Ray' to the tree as an alias for Medical Imaging.

Make It Quick

Callers dial your number and expect to be connected. You want to play them a greeting message first before asking what they want but don't keep them waiting listening to a 2 minute mandatory greeting regarding COVID precautions. They heard all that last time—so they pressed zero and ... the greeting restarted at the beginning! They hang up and call a different company. Is that what you want?

Recommendations

We recommend that senior staff actually try calling the company

phone line to experience it for themselves—and we suggest ways of improving the experience.

The mandatory greeting should be **short**. If you **MUST** talk about your COVID precautions then make that an option. How about "Thanks for calling ABC Pharmacy. For our COVID compliance rules press #."? Then go into the selection menu **with the most used choices first**. Frequent callers should be able to dial your number, listen to the start of the greeting to confirm they got the right company and press 1 for the pharmacist—end of story. Quick and efficient. Happy caller.

If you need a 2-tier selection then that might be OK but resist 3 or more levels. If you're that complex then pay for departmental phone numbers.

- Short Intro message
- Get caller to destination swiftly
- Try phoning your number to get the real customer experience
- Don't be proud of a 28 page IVR tree—remember KISS

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at peter@tmcconsulting.ca.

This article is reproduced from the March 2021 edition of *TMC's Advisor*

©2021 TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc.

Peter, as an engineer & technology management consultant, has developed innovative & cost-effective solutions for clients in many industries.

An Emergency Plan in Your Pocket By Guy Robertson

Emergency Planners and Managers work hard to design emergency response plans to best serve their organizations. The work can drag on and they often need more time to make sure that they do a great job and include everything. Unfortunately, time and money alone do not guarantee good planning or plans that work. Here's a novel way to create a tiny plan that has been proven to save lives in actual emergencies.



The Big Plan

Conscientious Emergency Planners tend to develop large plans of over 200 pages. These plans have many good points - they are comprehensive, they comply with the ISO 22320 standard and they would be useful if everyone understood the contents. Unfortunately, these plans usually don't help ordinary staff as many organizations have no culture of preparedness. The binders sit on a shelf, unused and largely forgotten.

Preparedness Culture

Some of our clients create emergency preparedness programs where every employee is trained on the importance of preparedness and business resumption. In these cases, the employees are given a miniature emergency plan to keep in their pocket or to store on their phone.

Design

The best plans have the following features:

- Brevity
- Clarity
- Readability
- Attractiveness of design and layout



- Ease of updating and revision
- Appropriate for a particular staff: recognizing physical capabilities and experience in responding to potentially unsafe or dangerous circumstances
- Appropriateness for the particular organization's culture
- Site specificity: addressing the organization's risks at a specific site or sites

Paper response plans should have a small amount of space available for user customization, including the locations of safe gathering sites and emergency communication details. In some instances, brochure users might scribble additional information—for example, family telephone numbers

and addresses—in margins. This kind of personal customization is usually acceptable. Paper plans should be produced on thicker and more durable stock, since they will suffer wear-and-tear over time, especially if people are reviewing them frequently.

Use

In many organizations, new employees receive the brochure during their first day on the job, along with an invitation to the next emergency response orientation session. The brochure contains basic safety orientation and emergency response basics. They are later used as part of business continuity training and later still, as instructions to follow during a disaster.

Security Caveat

Brochures must be carefully protected, especially if they include confidential corporate information.

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at guy@tmcconsulting.ca.

This article is reproduced from the March 2021 edition of *TMC's Advisor*

©2021 TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc.

Guy Robertson is a senior planner at TMC and an instructor at the Justice Institute of BC and Langara College. He has written five books and numerous articles on corporate security and disaster planning, and offered workshops and lectures at conferences across North America and in the UK.

Media Crisis Preparedness By Maria Colasurdo

The news media has a clearly defined understanding of what counts as news: a major crime, a major disaster or a major crisis. A crisis occurs when the reputation of an organization is threatened or actually harmed by bad press. Nasty stories can make the public lose confidence in an organization. Those stories can be accurate or inaccurate. It doesn't matter because the damage has been done. Here's our advice on how to be proactive.



Making Things Worse

While there are proven methods to handle the media and to make sure that the best available information is broadcast, there are also ways to deepen a crisis.

We all know about politicians and business leaders who automatically say "No comment". It almost never sends the right message, nor do attempts to change the subject or to suggest that the whole thing has been blown out of proportion.

Some company spokespersons react to reporters' questions without full knowledge of the situation. They hide behind jargon and even when they tell the truth, they succeed in confusing everybody. Sometimes companies will deal with the media through several spokespersons, all of whom use different statistics, offer different explanations, and send out contradictory messages.

Develop a Plan

Smart companies develop crisis management plans. First, they determine the kinds of crises that can hit them. Scandals, white-collar crime, mergers, firings, false accusations, downsizing, and financial problems can lead to a crisis for any organization. It's no use pretending that a crisis can't happen - that's dangerous thinking.

Maria is a skilled researcher and oversees TMC benchmarking studies.



An important part of the plan is to stay alert for any hint of a crisis and aim to resolve it before it causes trouble. At the first sign of a possible crisis, senior managers should meet to discuss it and find ways to contain it. If it can't be contained, decide on messages that the spokesperson will deliver.

Certain background information can be prepared in advance for each potential type of crisis. For example, a drug company can have information explaining their standard protocols for dealing with drug contamination.

Much depends on the skills of the corporate spokesperson, who gives interviews and answers reporters' questions.

The Spokesperson

A spokesperson can be the CEO, a VP, or an experienced communications specialist. There is one general rule that he or she must obey: always tell the truth.

It's better to say "I don't know" than to dish up self-serving baffle. And it's never wise to avoid the media. If a spokesperson hides, reporters can always find somebody else to comment on the situation.

When this happens, a company loses the opportunity to control their message and keep the record straight from the beginning.

Manage the Message

Provide short, simple, press releases – never longer than a page. Reporters are suspicious of complicated graphs and statistics or anything that sounds like advertising. When a spokesperson meets the media regularly and provides honest information, a crisis won't be prolonged.

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at maria@tmcconsulting.ca.

This article is reproduced from the March 2021 edition of *TMC's Advisor*

©2021 TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc.

Power Outage Preparedness *By Ellen Koskinen-Dodgson*

Climate Change and COVID-19 are each causing changes in electricity demand and service availability. BC Hydro reported that climate change-caused storms that cause power outages have tripled since 2013. Wildfire numbers have also soared. 2020 brought Covid-19 and the drive to work from home. All of this has affected electrical delivery and increased the need for power outage preparedness.



More Outages

Climate change is blamed for the dramatic increase in the severity of storms and wildfires which cause power outages. Since 2013, when 300,000 British Columbia customers were affected annually, the number has grown to well over 1 million. This trend is true for all of Canada as well as the rest of the world. With predictions of progressively worse storms to come, these numbers will continue to increase.

Top Outage Causes

- Trees – 33%
- Bad weather – 21%
- Equipment failure – 9%
- Other (customer, vandals...) – 9%
- Scheduled Maintenance – 5%
- Motor Vehicle Accidents – 5%
- Birds and Animals – 5%

Demand Changes

Added to the increasing frequency of outages, demand for electricity has also changed. First, the “addiction” to personal electronics has caused a dramatic shift in electricity consumption. We use our personal electronics for hours every day, then charge them at home. With COVID, a great many people are working from home so the suburbs now have a high



demand for electricity. A power outage at your home location now has business implications.

Preparedness Planning

Regardless of how you decide to mitigate the risk of power outages for staff working from home, this is a new situation that needs to be addressed in your business continuity plan. When staff are working from the office, UPS and generator power backup make sense. When they work from home, the costs are usually not justified so a different approach is required.

I recommend that you answer the following questions and include the results in your BCP:

1. Who are the people who are working from home, either full time or part time?

2. Which of these people should have a mitigation plan for a local power outage? That is, who should be on-line at certain times or at all times?
3. Do these people fall into two or more categories with different mitigation requirements for each? For example, office phone extension? cell-phone? Laptop VPN? Video connectivity?

Possible mitigation plans include:

- Use cellphone for email and to generate a hotspot for a laptop VPN
- Relocate to Starbucks
- Head back to the office
- Provide on-site battery backup, either with a UPS or solar panels
- Establish a connection to their electric car battery for energy needs

When you’ve updated your BCP, remember to test it to confirm that it makes sense.

If you’d like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at ellen@tmcconsulting.ca.

This article is reproduced from the March 2021 edition of *TMC’s Advisor*

©2021 TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc.

Ellen Koskinen-Dodgson is President and Managing Partner of TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc. She is an IT and Telecommunications Management Consultant, electrical engineer, author, speaker, media resource and Expert Witness.