



## What tool for BCP?

*The toolkit of the Business Continuity Plan, from its conception to its implementation in a crisis situation*

### Introduction

The purpose of this publication is to guide the reader in the choice and implementation of tools for the development of a Business Continuity Plan and to facilitate crisis management. The article is based on feedback from various sectors of activity (finance, industry, services, administrations, etc.) and establishments of very different sizes (banking group, SMEs, regional administration, etc.).

### Do we really need tools to achieve a BCP?

The question is worth asking and some companies have made the choice to rely only on office tools to perform all tasks of mapping, analysis and documentation of their BCP. Although this approach may seem sufficient in the case of an SME, it shows its limits in a more complex context, and, in all cases, when one is concerned with maintaining the BCP in operational conditions. How can we guarantee the freshness and consistency of a voluminous and constantly evolving documentation, especially for BCP technical devices? And in case of crisis, how to quickly access this documentation, how to communicate if the premises of the company are destroyed or inaccessible, how to coordinate hundreds of tasks to be done in a few hours?

My answer to this question is "yes but". Yes, specific tools are needed to support the business continuity management process, including for an SME. In fact, several studies show that two-thirds of companies already have BCP software or plan to acquire it. But we must remain pragmatic. In this field, many software is offered, often too complex and little or badly used. It is therefore important to make sure that the product features are well adapted to the context of your organization.

## The expected features of a BCP software

Comprehensive BCP software should cover the entire business continuity management process, including the initial Business Impact Analysis (BIA) and risk analysis phases, the implementation phase, the test and control phases, the maintenance and the management of evolutions. It must also provide support for crisis management by assisting decision-making, facilitating mobilization and division of tasks and, more generally, by providing assistance in managing recovery operations.

To help choose a BCP software, we will group these expectations into feature families. An annexed table containing these functionalities could be used to carry out a comparative study of the envisaged softwares and could also serve as a questionnaire for a call for tender.

The main features proposed for the evaluation of a BCP software are:

- Functions for collecting and analyzing information
- Modeling and risk analysis functions
- BCP development and maintenance functions
- BCP test and evaluation functions
- The functions of assistance to the triggering of the plan and the control of operations in case of crisis

Other complementary features are also proposed, as well as more technical criteria of choice of software.

### ***Functions for collecting and analyzing information***

The development of a BCP begins with a detailed analysis of the context and business continuity requirements:

- Affected Entities (Headquarters, Subsidiaries, Departments, etc.)
- Mapping business activities
- Identification of resources required for business processes (staff, tools, skills, external services, etc.)
- Location of activities

Some information is often already listed through other computer applications or spreadsheets. We will check if the BCP software allows an easy integration of this information.

BCP's design is then based on a Business Impact Analysis (BIA). The software must make it possible to express these needs in a sufficiently detailed level. In particular, it must be able to express:

- The consequences of an interruption
- Maximum Acceptable Interruption Time
- Maximum Acceptable Data Loss, which defines the need for data freshness required
- The level of service degradation bearable. This criterion must take into account the resources needed and the duration of the various stages of returning to a normal or near-normal situation.

The information collected is often voluminous and needs to be analyzed, cross-checked, both to check consistency and to lay the foundation for the future BCP.

The integration of this information in a relational database is an advantage because it allows to easily consider all kinds of analysis requests.

### ***Modeling and risk analysis functions***

In conjunction with Business Impact Analysis (BIA), risk analysis helps to set priorities and define the future target of the Business Continuity Plan.

The proposed model must be adapted to the BCP. It must make it possible to take into account all the types of risk dealt with in a BCP (natural disasters, total or partial destruction of the site, unavailability of staff, serious breakdowns, etc.). Some software is more open and can extend the scope to all risks that can lead to a crisis, including when business continuity is not directly engaged.

The risk analysis functions must allow:

- Documentation of risks (origin, prevention or protection measures, potentiality, level of impact on the company)
- A classification of the risks according to their gravity level
- The formalization of a recovery strategy and a risk prevention plan

### ***BCP development and maintenance functions***

These are essential functions expected from BCP software. A Business Continuity Plan consists of very diverse procedures, some very technical, such as switching to a backup computer site, the other organizational, such as staff mobilization or crisis management, such as communication or taking care of victims. The implementation of these procedures results in hundreds of tasks that need to be organized, documented and kept up to date.

In particular, a BCP software will ensure the integration of all necessary documentation for the implementation of BCP activation procedures:

- Implementation procedures (tasks, actors, timing)
- All the documents needed for implementation (checklists, plans, reference documents, etc.)
- Synchronization constraints between the different components of the plan

The software must be sufficiently flexible to allow the integration of the often numerous existing documents (directory, technical procedures, schemas, contracts, inventories, etc.).

Keeping the BCP in operational conditions requires adequate tools to monitor this documentation.

In particular, the BCP software must be able to be used to manage the documentation in a unique and centralized way:

- structuring of the documentation,
- selective access via a local or remote network,
- workflow, validation of documentation,
- tracing changes,
- dashboards allowing to know the state of each BCP component (operational or not, tested or not, validated or not,)
- BCP version management

The software must also facilitate BCP maintenance operations by making it possible to locate the elements concerned by a change of technical or organizational nature. Here again, the use of a relational database facilitates this type of analysis.

In the case of an organization with several entities (eg subsidiaries) or several similar sites, some complementary functions may be very useful:

- the diffusion of standard plans
- a modular construction of the BCP facilitating the exchange of good practices between the entities

### ***BCP test and evaluation features***

Two families of complementary features are expected:

- Periodic evaluation functions, based on checklists or questionnaires  
These functions must produce dashboards that can go up to a reassessment of the residual risks

- Functions for organizing and monitoring tests:
  - Development of a test plan
  - Definition and documentation of tests (objectives, subsets tested, timing)
  - Piloting functions of the tests (ideally, a test will be piloted like a real crisis)
  - Trace events and problems encountered during a test (with historization)
  - Production of a test report and dashboards
  - Development and follow-up of a corrective action plan

### ***Functions of assistance to the triggering of the plan and the control of operations in case of crisis***

The BCP software must first of all facilitate crisis management by providing the main actors with all the information they need to mobilize teams, analyze the situation, make decisions, coordinate and monitor the recovery operations until a return to a normal or near-normal situation:

- BCP Directory of internal and external actors
- Pre-defined strategies according to the nature of the incident
- Immediate access to decision support information
- Planning recovery operations
- Operational steering assistance (alerts, list of priority actions, etc.)
- Taking into account events (progress, incidents), with schedule adjustment
- Tracking recovery incidents
- Dissemination of useful documentation to plan stakeholders (procedures, technical information, forms, building plans, etc.)

Some software also offer communication capabilities that are very useful in the event of a crisis in order to rapidly mobilize or inform the main actors:

- Alert and mobilization by SMS or messaging
- Sending Targeted Information by Mail
- Viewing targeted information (depending on the user profile)

## ***Other selection criteria***

As with any software, special attention will be paid to the quality and usability of the BCP software, especially :

- The technical environment  
Proven environment, compliant with company standards.
- The portability of the tool  
This is an important aspect for a BCP. Some solutions provide copies on removable media and can be used without software installation.
- Data import / export capabilities  
This feature mentioned several times in this document simplifies the initial phase of information gathering and facilitates update tasks.
- Network use  
Networking is essential if many correspondents are to contribute to the development of the BCP. An intranet-type solution also makes it possible to reach the largest number of employees, especially in crisis situations.  
External hosting is a solution to ensure immediate availability in the event of a major disaster.
- Ergonomics and documentation  
Ergonomics is also a very important point. Some employees will use the software only occasionally to make updates. Its use must be intuitive and ideally self-documented. Here we find the interest of a "web" application.
- The publisher  
The publisher must offer sufficient guarantees of durability as well as support for the implementation. In the case of an open-source solution, we will ensure the reputation of the various components and the level of investment necessary for the appropriation of the solution.

## Existing software

The vast majority of market tools cover the information collection and analysis functions and the BCP development and maintenance functions. It should be noted that the first of these functions (analysis / restitution of collected data) can also contribute usefully to crisis management.

These tools are then either oriented "Risk Management" (modeling and risk analysis functions) or oriented "Crisis Management" (assistance in triggering the plan, management of recovery operations, crisis communication, etc.) . Software that covers all features are very minor.

A minority but significant number of companies have opted for documentation based on the Microsoft Office suite, for cost reasons (these tools are already available in the company) and flexibility of implementation (standard documents company, no specific training).

A solution that combines the flexibility of Office documents with the rigor imposed by BCP software is often preferred (ease of use, re-use of existing documents, on-line and off-line use, etc.).

Finally, a Web interface is desirable today to extend selective access to a larger number of BCP actors.

Some examples of commercial BCP software:

- Shadow Planner – a BCM Software
- LDRPS, marketed by Sungard. It covers the entire cycle of a BCP.
- eFront-GRC, software specialized in risk management and which includes a crisis management module. It is marketed by eFront.
- RVR-Parad, by Devoteam.

BCP-Expert also offers the "[WebPCA](#)" solution. WebPCA is a BCP portal that covers all the functions presented in this document, made from well-known open-source components and low cost of appropriation.

## **Complementary tools**

The BCP tools described in the previous pages can cover both the life cycle of the Business Continuity Plan and crisis management, from the mobilization of actors until the return to normal. There is still a need for additional tools to cover the blackout phase where a major BCP actor is informed of the occurrence of a disaster but does not yet have access to all the necessary resources.

### ***The memo sheet***

The memo card is a simple and inexpensive solution. It allows to keep on oneself the information essential to the immediate actions in case of alert. It will contain for example:

- Contact details of key actors (eg crisis structure, toll free number, website)
- Instructions in case of mobilization
- The address of the fallback site (s)

The memo sheet can be adapted to each category of actor (crisis cell, manager, collaborator). Credit card format, it will rank easily in a wallet.

### ***The USB key***

The USB key is an interesting complement to the memo file by making available to its owner all or part of the BCP documentation. Therefore, it must be secured by encryption of the content and it will be reserved for the main actors of the BCP.

Although very interesting, this solution often faces two difficulties: the need to open USB ports on some workstations, which is often contrary to the company's security policy, and the update that can be binding on the holder.

### ***The Smartphone***

The smartphone is an alternative to the USB key. The main actors of the BCP are most often equipped with smartphones with storage capacities. Subject to protection of this information, as in the case of the USB key, the smartphone is an interesting tool that allows automatic synchronization of information.

### ***The toll free number***

The toll-free number is a simple way to quickly distribute the first instructions to different categories of personnel. It can be implemented in minutes from pre-established scenarios in a voice server.

### ***The website***

The website is an important tool that allows communication from the first minutes after a disaster, provided that the server is hosted on a remote site and that the internet links are operational. The

website can be linked to the BCP software and thus offer all the communication, access to documentation and control functions.

## Conclusion

The choice of a suitable BCP software greatly contributes to the success of a BCP project. It is structuring and facilitates initial analysis of the environment, business activities, continuity needs and potential risks. It allows to maintain a documentation often voluminous and in constant evolution. The choice of a BCP software subsequent to the development of the plan remains possible. In this case, particular attention will be paid to solutions that facilitate the recovery of existing documentation.

For crisis management, this type of software must provide quick access to documentation, facilitate decision-making and control of recovery operations. The communication and notification functions are another interesting point, even if these functions can be provided by additional dedicated tools.

BCP software offers are diverse. The most common software is offered by IT security and business continuity professionals. Open-source solutions also exist ([WebPCA](#)) and offer great flexibility of implementation. In any case, we will ensure the sustainability of the solution (publisher support, strength of the open-source communities involved).

Do you have questions, comments, feedback, ...?

Contact me : [robert.bergeron@bcp-expert.com](mailto:robert.bergeron@bcp-expert.com)

## Appendix: Evaluation Grid for BCP Software

Software : \_\_\_\_\_ Version : \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher / Distributor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Functions for collecting and analyzing information	Score	Comment
Does the software make it possible to take into account the organization of the company (group, subsidiaries)?		
Does the software allow mapping of business activities?		
Does the software make it possible to analyze the impact of an interruption for each activity of the company?		
Does the software allow you to list the critical resources associated with the activities?		
Does the software allow the classification of resources according to their level of criticality?		
Does the software help locate critical resources?		
Does the software make it possible to define business continuity requirements (RPO/RTO, level of service degradation, etc.)?		
<b>Average score</b>		
Modeling and Risk Analysis Functions	Score	Comment
Are there functions for identification, analysis and risk assessment?		
Does the software allow a risk classification?		
Does the software make it possible to define a risk reduction strategy and a recovery strategy?		
Does the software enable the monitoring of risk reduction actions?		
<b>Average score</b>		

<b>BCP development and maintenance functions</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Does the software make it possible to structure the business continuity plan (by plan, by entity, by domain, etc.)?		
Does the software allow the description of all BCP components (recovery places, procedures, actors, technical documentation, constraints, etc.)?		
Are there dashboards to know the status of each BCP component (operational or not, tested or not, validated or not)?		
Does the software allow differentiated access to information depending on the role of the user (BCP manager, BCP correspondent, collaborator, etc.)?		
Does the software allow to analyze the impact of a change on the BCP?		
Does the software allow tracking of updates (versioning, alerts, traces, workflow, ..)?		
<b>Average score</b>		
<b>BCP test and evaluation features</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Does the software make it possible to define a periodic control plan and to follow it up?		
Does the software offer functions to organize the execution and monitoring of tests?		
- Can we define a test plan?		
- Can we define and document each test?		
- Can we pilot the tests?		
- Can we trace the events and problems encountered during a test?		
- Can we produce a test report and associated dashboards?		

Does the software allow for the development of a corrective action plan after a test and for monitoring?		
<b>Average score</b>		
<b>Functions of assistance to the triggering of the plan and the control of operations in case of crisis</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Is there a BCP directory including internal and external stakeholders with their contact information?		
Does the software offer notification functions (via e-mail, SMS, etc.)?		
Are there pre-defined recovery strategies according to the nature of the disaster?		
Can we adapt the recovery strategy according to the reality of the disaster?		
Does the software provide immediate access to decision support information?		
Does the software produce a schedule of recovery operations ?		
Does the software provide support for operations management (alerts, list of priority actions, etc.)?		
Does the software allow consideration of progress events and allow planning adjustments?		
Is there management of recovery incidents (logging, tracking)?		
Does the software allow the dissemination of useful documentation to plan stakeholders (procedures, technical information, forms, site plans, etc.)?		
Does the software allow the distribution of messages and instructions to employees according to their profile?		
<b>Average score</b>		

<b>Additional functions</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Ability to integrate with existing information sources		
Possibility of defining standard plans (example: subsidiary plans)		
Modular design of plans facilitating the addition, withdrawal, or even exchange of subsets of the plan		
Ease of re-use of existing documentation		
History Management		
Numerous dashboards		
Ability to customize standard states		
<b>Average score</b>		
<b>Other selection criteria</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The technical environment		
The portability of the tool		
Network use		
Ergonomics		
The documentation		
The support		
<b>Average score</b>		