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2

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## Phone Service Follows Agency Workers Scattered In Crisis

BY RICHARD MULLEN

Should a federal facility experience a terrorist strike—or even the threat of one—the first among the casualties may be order.

A bomb threat phoned into a switchboard could send thousands of agency personnel streaming out of a building, scattering away from the very means of ascertaining their status and their safety: their telephones.

A new company, sprung from the post-9/11 environment, says it has devised the means to meet this challenge, and help federal agencies get in line with mandates from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

TeleContinuity, Inc., formed in November 2001, has combined its unique software with off-the-shelf hardware components to create a means of giving organizations a way of maintaining their telephone connections in the case of a catastrophic event.

TeleContinuity's core service is to reroute calls, according to Roy Pinchot, chief executive officer of the privately held company based in Rockville, Md. The key advantage here is that customers can go on using their same regular telephone numbers even if, for whatever reason, they can't get anywhere near their phones.

"In the case of a disaster, you don't know where you're going to be," so the TeleContinuity system provides customers with the flexibility to take their phone numbers with them,

Pinchot said.

With this service, "You have number portability," he said. "Your same [telephone] number will ring on whatever device you tell it to, and you can change it over and over," for instance, as you move from place to place during an emergency.

If your phone line is cut, you can redirect your phone number to "any device that will talk," whether a PC, laptop computer, cell phone, regular land line, or other device, he said.

There are some 23,000 people working in the Pentagon, using about as many telephone lines, Pinchot said. "What if they had to evacuate?" he asked. In short order the Pentagon would empty, and there'd be "nobody on the phones," right when their ability to respond might be all-important.

"Telephones are critical to their mission. Our job [would be] to make sure those telephones stay up," Pinchot said. His company does not yet count the Department of Defense (DOD) among the users of TeleContinuity's service, but "we believe DOD will be our biggest customer," once his company has had a chance to show its wares.

Pinchot has reason to be bullish about acquiring federal agency customers such as DOD, and in the near term.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), an agency that now is part of DHS, has issued guidelines to federal agencies for implementing continuity of operations (COOP) plans, intended to keep them up and running following a disaster.

Regarding COOP, FEMA issued two guideline papers, circulars 65 and 67, in June 2004, Pinchot said.

FEMA circular 65 "mandates that all federal agencies must have a COOP plan." FEMA circular 67 says "You have to test [your agency's] plan and have it operational," Pinchot said.

This mandate has existed for some years, but "it was a joke before [Sept. 11, 2001]. Now it's a critical point at these agencies."

So agencies are scurrying to comply with the COOP mandate, he said. "They're all just burning the wires on COOP."

TeleContinuity is ready and waiting to serve.

"Within minutes we can reroute an entire agency's [telecommunications traffic]," Pinchot said. The sky's the limit on the number of lines: Pinchot said that his company's product can handle 100,000 calls or twice that many for a client, performing the switchover in minutes.

The idea is an "on-the-fly network [in which] the phone calls get put through despite the constant chaos" of a catastrophic situation, he said.

"Our system is designed to maintain continuity of communications during the chaos of any disaster [in which] nobody knows where they're going to be."

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