

Continuity e-GUIDE

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Meet the Experts

BNet's Successful Formula for Public-Private Initiatives

By Peter R. Picarillo

Measuring Success

We all know the real estate industry's metric for property value... location, location, location. No matter where you live it remains the ultimate gauge of value. A similar scale can be applied to success of any proposed partnership or agreement... value, value, value. The key success factor must be an equal, or perceived equal, share of value for both parties. We've all been there, whether buying a home, car or service. The deal never happens unless you feel you are getting tangible value for your money. This universal law of capitalism applies even more so in the new world of public-private partnerships for homeland security and crisis management.

Creating Value in a Post 9-11 World

If we accept this theory then we can define partnership value in very basic terms. For businesses, value would exist in partnerships that enhance the ability to rapidly recover from an externally caused interruption of business. Another area of value would be the ability to communicate with the public sector agencies in control of the immediate physical environment to ascertain information vital to making sound decisions. The private sector easily assimilates the cause-effect and financial damage that occurs when business gets interrupted. It is not always so apparent to the public sector, especially from the public safety agency perspective.

The potential of economic damage to the municipality that results from the loss of businesses, tax revenues, jobs and the service industries in the aftermath of a disaster, often eludes government authorities, especially during the response phase of an emergency. Typically, responding to the needs of businesses is reactive in nature and not pro-active. The differential in these two approaches can easily be the difference between a rapid recovery and a domino effect economic disaster with the effects lasting many years. The hackneyed phrase in business, "time is money," doesn't go far enough when it comes to recovering from a disaster. A better phrase would be, "time is money, lost confidence, lost customers, lost market share, possible bankruptcy, etc." There is good news, however; creating partnerships that address these important issues is not rocket science. In most cases, the simple willingness to collaborate is the touchstone to success. Government and business partnering to aid business recovery ultimately protects the municipality from serious economic injury. Sounds simple, right? Unfortunately, it too often takes a major catastrophe to open everyone's eyes.

The traditional silos of the public and private sector have begun to crumble in the wake of the 9-11 tragedy as terrorists clearly targeted not only our freedom as a people but the strength of our nation, its economy and wealth. This created a clear need for government and businesses to partner for the greater benefit of securing and protecting our nation's critical infrastructure, over 80% of which is owned by the private sector.

The Business Network of Emergency Resources (BNet) is one organization that can't be

accused of lack of foresight. They have been actively involved in offering a solution for over 5 years.

BNet, Conviction and the Simple Solution

Established in 1999, BNet was an offshoot of a 1997 New York State study titled the Joint Loss Reduction Partnership (JLRP), which joined the State Emergency Management Office with representatives from major New York companies to explore the critical needs of businesses following a disaster. At the conclusion of the study the number one critical need identified was *rapid access to the workplace following an emergency*. Unfortunately, no process to facilitate this overriding need existed.

The corporate members of the JLRP along with a team of public sector advisors felt so strongly about what the study uncovered that they formed the not-for-profit BNet to follow up and carry through the study's findings and recommendations. BNet's Board clearly felt there was adequate value for both government and the private sector to develop a Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS). The system would allow businesses to identify and securely credential their most critical employees to enable them to gain rapid access to their business following an emergency event that resulted in access restrictions. The most difficult part would be to convince government and law enforcement of the utility and value the program had to offer. They quickly found the perfect test market for their program, the City of Buffalo, New York.

The Proving Ground

Buffalo was the perfect choice. A city plagued by crippling snowstorms that often caused the complete shutdown of the city. CEAS would provide a solution to the often heard mandates of "essential travel only" and "no unauthorized travel;" phrases left wide open to interpretation and not often understood even by those enforcing them. In essence, CEAS would create the corporate "first responder," the business equivalent to the police officer and firefighter. The concept was accepted in Buffalo and the next step was to introduce it to a "major" market, New York City.

BNet to Broadway and Beyond

Being a native and former public official of the Big Apple, I'm as skeptical as the next guy. As Old Blue Eyes said, "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere," rings a certain truth. No one gets established in NYC without jumping through the proverbial "hoops" and once you've had a measure of success others begin to take notice. The endeavor to bring CEAS to New York was plagued with impeccably bad timing.

In 2000 the argument for CEAS was compelling; especially in a City that was essentially the financial center of the world. No matter how large or important New York was, convincing government officials to invest in a program that didn't impact the bottom line was a challenge; no doubt this will sound familiar to the business continuity professional. In the case of CEAS it was no challenge at all since the entire program was funded by the private sector firms. The only cost to the City was in the commitment to officially acknowledge the program and commit some written policy to it. Executive approval to move ahead with CEAS was quickly secured and by September 2001 CEAS NYC was ready to be unveiled. Who could have predicted what would happen?

The tragic events of 9-11 only served to magnify the need for the CEAS as enormous amounts of time and manpower were spent securing and providing access into the "ground zero" area; an area congested with critical financial service companies. Access to the restricted area may have been facilitated in a few days with CEAS in place, instead it took

weeks to refine and perfect an ad hoc system that lacked basic security measures. The economic impact of the delay may never be known, but the severe effect 9-11 had on New York City is well documented.

With CEAS coming to fruition in New York City, interest has begun to spring up in other cities and states across the country.

Clearly the effects of 9-11 have heightened sensitivity to the critical role businesses play in the overall landscape of Homeland Security. The private sector owns over 80% of our nations critical infrastructure and to protect it we all need to begin breaking some long held paradigms of the past. A public-private initiative like CEAS, where there is value for everyone, truly deserves the attention of government and businesses across the country. Interest is already springing up on both coasts and in Canada. The fact of the matter is we simply don't know where the next disaster will happen and where a program like CEAS will be needed.

About the Author

Peter Picarillo, CBCP, is a retired NYPD Sergeant and former Director of Public-Private Initiatives for the NYC Office of Emergency Management. He is currently the Managing Director for BNET and manages Picarillo Consulting, a strategic management consulting practice. For more details on BNet's Corporate Emergency Access System, visit www.bnetinc.org/ceas.

