



A Celebration

Written by **Mel Gosling**:

Just because you've achieved certification against a Business Continuity standard, it doesn't mean that you can cope with an incident that causes disruption, as TopTek found out to their cost!

At first, the wailing siren drowned out all conversation in the small private dining room as the police car sped past one of London's most fashionable restaurants, then everyone stopped trying to talk and listen against the deafening noise until it started to recede into the distance.

"We'd better be getting back now", said Max Manhausen, the CEO of TopTek Technologies, as he raised his right arm to summon a waiter to call a couple of taxis to take him and his executive team back from the celebratory lunch that they were holding across London to their offices in Docklands.

Pam Firestone, TopTek's Business Continuity Manager was still beaming with pride as she heard the waiter tell Max that there might be a problem with the taxis. TopTek had just achieved ISO 22301 certification, and Max had insisted that she came out with the TopTek's senior management team to celebrate. ISO 22301 is the international standard for business continuity management, and tomorrow, all of TopTek's competitors, and all of Pam's peers in the world of business continuity, would know of her achievement in having TopTek's business continuity management system certified as meeting the standard.

"Apparently there might be some difficulty getting some taxis right now, it appears that there's some sort of terrorist scare, but the waiter's gone to find out some more information", explained Max. In the meantime he's sending us some more coffee. I'll give my PA a call to say that we'll be a little late."

Max slid his iPhone out of his jacket pocket and pressed 2 to connect directly through to his PA's telephone, but the call failed. He pressed 2 again, and the same thing happened. "This damned thing doesn't appear to work", he complained.

"Maybe, if there's a terrorist alert, the mobile networks have been shut down", explained Peter Sokolovsky, TopTek's ICT Director. "That's standard practice nowadays."

"Waiter!" called out Max. "Can we use your telephone line for a minute?" The mobile networks don't seem to be working."

"I'm sorry sir, but the telephone's in use at the moment, and there's a bit of a queue. I'll let you know when it's free", responded the waiter apologetically. "A number of our customers are trying to make calls to find out if they've been affected by the bombs."

“What bombs?” asked Max.

“The bombs that went off about an hour ago in Docklands, and as I said, there’s a terrorist alert and …” the waiter tried to reply as Max rudely interrupted him.

“Where were the bombs, what’s happened, is there any damage?” demanded Max.

“I don’t really know,” the waiter replied. “It’s on the television news in the kitchen, it looks pretty bad.”

“Can we have a look?” asked Max as he rose from the table before the waiter could answer. “Pam you’d better come along with me”, he commanded as he strode towards the door of the small private dining room followed by both the waiter and his Business Continuity Manager.

The situation did not look good from the news broadcast that was being shown on the television in the restaurant’s kitchens. There had been large explosions outside two stations near Canary Wharf, in London’s Docklands, a number of buildings had been badly damaged, there had been casualties, and the police were looking for other devices. People had been evacuated from a number of buildings in Docklands, and every station in central London and Docklands was being closed as a precaution until its immediate area had been checked.

Max and Pam stood open mouthed, staring at the television, as the waiter said, “You can use the telephone now if you’d like sir, but I don’t seem to be able to get any taxis for you.”

Max rushed to the telephone and dialled his PA’s number. The telephone rang four times before Max was put through to his PA’s voice mail. Without listening to his PA’s greeting or leaving a message, Max slammed the telephone down to end the call, then quickly picked it up again to dial TopTek’s main switchboard number. This time the telephone just rang and rang, and nobody answered. The switchboard voice mail system had not been set.

“No reply?” asked Pam, who was now standing behind her boss. “I’m not surprised, from the map that they’ve just shown on the television it looks like our building’s been damaged, and it’s certainly been evacuated.”

“Damn!” exclaimed Max. “We’d better get back and tell the others,” he said as he quickly turned and almost ran back to their private room.

Max tried to stay as calm as the waiters who were serving more coffee as he explained to his colleagues what he and Pam had just seen and heard. As he finished, he asked if anyone had any questions.

“Only one,” said Dennis Longbotham, TopTek’s Finance Director, “What the hell do we do now?”

“Well”, said Max, “That’s pretty straightforward, as you should all know. We invoke our Incident Management Plan, and if the incident is likely to cause a serious disruption to our operations, we invoke our Business Continuity Plan. Fortunately, we’ve got all the members of our Crisis Management Team here, along with Pam, who developed the plans.”

“As I said,” continued Dennis, “What the hell do we do now? Our building’s been evacuated, God knows where all the staff will have gone, and we’re stuck here with one telephone, no means of transport, and coffee!”

“Well, we’re all familiar with both the plans,” said Pam, “After all, we’ve only recently exercised them both, and we used an evacuation scenario. The first thing that we need to do after evacuating the building is to look to the welfare of our staff. Angie, staff is your area,” Pam said looking at TopTek’s HR Director, “What do you need to do?”

“I know what the plan says,” replied Angie, “But what on earth do you expect me to be able to do from here? The rest of the HR team should be able to handle things, but I’ve no way of finding out what’s happening. We were thinking about implementing an emergency messaging system that used the Internet, but if you recall we decided that it wouldn’t be worth the cost of effort to implement.”

“OK,” Max intervened, “Let’s assume that the HR team are handling things. What’s next Pam?”

“We need to establish a command centre for the Crisis Management Team,” Pam replied. “We have two nominated centres. One is at our Disaster Recovery site, within a couple of miles of the office, and the other is at our distribution warehouse in Dartford, Kent.”

“Oh, that’s handy”, joked Dennis, “And how do we get there?”

“Well, our DR supplier has got other offices that we can use,” explained Pam. “I’m sure that they’ll have one fairly near here. We need to give them a call to check.”

“Excellent,” said Max, “I’ll leave you to do that Pam while we discuss what else we need to do. The restaurant will let you use their telephone, if it’s available.”

“I’m sorry Max,” replied Pam, “But I don’t have their number. It’s in the plans, and I haven’t got a copy with me.”

“Does anyone have a copy of our plans?” asked Max as he scanned the worried faces looking back at him. As expected, nobody had copies of the plans. They had been told to keep copies of the plans in their desks in the office and at home. Copies were also held in both command centres. They had also discussed keeping PDF copies of the plans on their smartphones, but this had been vetoed by IT security.

“Well, the restaurant must have a telephone book, why not just look up their number and give them a call?” Max asked Pam.

“That’ll be no good,” replied Pam. “They’ll ask me for our activation code, and I don’t know what it is.”

“Don’t tell me,” said Dennis in a cynical tone of voice, “The code’s in the plans.”

“But surely,” said Max, “they’ll know who you are. After all, we’ve just signed a large order with them, and only last week we tested out the Disaster Recovery site.”

“Well, that’s true,” admitted Pam. “I’ll give it a try.”

Pam rose from the table and walked towards the door as Max turned back to his Crisis Management Team.

“OK Peter,” said Max to his ICT Director, “Apart from telling us that the emergency services have shut down the mobile telephone networks, what else can you tell us about ICT? Do we have any systems running, what’s happening to the website, and will your people be at the recovery site?”

“Look Max,” Peter replied in a strained voice, “I know as much about what’s going on as you do. The plan is to fail-over the website and email to the replica servers that are running at Dartford, and to recover all the other systems on replacements at the DR site. Copies of the latest backups are held at Dartford. However, none of that will happen unless the appropriate authorisation is given. We don’t, for example, want someone to rush out and buy new servers if the systems are going to be out of action for just a few hours.”

“And who gives the authorisation?” asked Max.

“Well, we do, the Crisis Management Team,” Peter replied.

“And nobody else?” asked Max in amazement, even though he had signed-off the procedure only a few months before.

“Well, I suppose Jane might, she’s my Operations Manager, as you know,” replied Peter. “She’d act on her own initiative if we weren’t contactable, although it’s against the procedures that we’ve laid down.”

“So, what do you think Peter?” asked Max, “Will Jane have acted on her initiative? I know that she’s pretty headstrong.”

“Probably, yes, but I can’t be sure. If she did, she would probably have gone to Dartford or the recovery site.”

“But we haven’t activated the recovery site yet, have we?” asked Max as Pam came back into the room after managing to get through to their DR supplier.

“Good news,” said Pam, “And bad news. The good news is that they knew who I was and waived the need for me to know the invocation code. Bad news in that all their DR sites in London have been taken by other customers, it seems that we have been a little slow off the mark, but they have a facility at Basingstoke that we could use.”

“Basingstoke!” exclaimed Max, “That’s miles away, and totally on the wrong side of London for most of our staff. What did you tell them?”

“I said thank you, and that we’d consider the offer and get back to them,” replied Pam.

“Have we got enough spare space in Dartford?” asked Max. “Wouldn’t it be better just to move our key people there for a few days? After all, that’s where we’re putting the systems.”

“You rejected that as an option a few months ago when we looked at our continuity and recovery strategies,” explained Pam, helpfully. “There are a few spare seats, but far too few for the numbers that we’d need in the first week.”

“We could get some portakabins,” suggested Roger, the Sales and Marketing Director. “I’d expect that we could get some within 24 hours. There’s plenty of room in the car park.”

“Yes, but we’d need to arrange for an electricity supply and network cabling so that our systems could be used from the portakabins. That might take a couple of days,” explained Peter.

“Look,” said Max authoritatively, “It’s now 3pm. The first bomb exploded at 1pm. We’ve lost 2 precious hours. We can’t just sit around here, nice as the surroundings are, drinking coffee and debating what might have happened and what we should do. We need to find out what the situation is, make some firm decisions, and ensure that the business keeps running as smoothly as possible.”

“Great,” moaned Dennis, “And how are we going to do all that?”

“Well, for a start,” decided Max, “Pam can call Dartford to find out the current situation. Then we’ll decide on whether to use Dartford or Basingstoke as our recovery site, and set the wheels in motion. Then we’ll leave here and make our way to the recovery site, or somewhere else where we’ve got some communications.”

Pam was already on her way back to the telephone before Max had finished speaking. The telephone was available, and she got through to the site manager at Dartford at the first attempt. They’d heard about the bombs, of course, and had tried to call the office in Docklands to find out what had happened. There had been no reply, and they couldn’t contact anyone by mobile telephone either. Also, the email system was down.

“Hasn’t the email system failed-over to the replica that you run in Dartford?” enquired Pam.

“No,” replied the site manager, “It needs to be activated by someone from ICT, and we’ve not managed to contact anyone who knows how to do it. By the way, the website is also down.”

“Yes,” replied Pam, “It would be. That needs to be manually failed-over as well.”

“You know what that means, don’t you?” asked the site manager. “We’re not able to take any new orders and existing clients can’t get support. There is a telephone number that they can contact, but if you call it there’s no reply. We’ve not received any orders for shipment since the system went down at 1pm, and won’t do until it’s back up again.”

“How many spare desks do you have at the moment?” asked Pam, abruptly changing the subject. “We need to consider relocating our critical staff to Dartford as the nearest available DR site for us to use is now Basingstoke.”

“Well, we’ve a couple of people on holiday, a few can work just as well from home, and we could double-up on people at desks. There’s also the interview room, we could squeeze about 4 people in there. So, 15, maybe 20 at a push.”

“Thanks,” said Pam, “I’ll call you back as soon as we’ve decided what to do. In the meantime, could you please keep trying to contact someone from ICT, Jane if possible, the Operations Manager. Tell them that we’ve invoked the Business

Continuity Plan, and that they need to invoke the ICT Recovery Plan. The website and email systems are to be failed-over to Dartford as planned using the replica servers, but for the moment they should put on hold any actions to recover the other servers until we find out what the situation is, and not to redirect the telephones until we know whether we're going to Basingstoke or Dartford."

"OK Pam, will do," replied the site manager. "As soon as we get email we can start sending out the orders that we're holding, and as soon as the website comes back we can take over the job of processing new orders until you've got some of the customer services people back. Also, once the telephones are redirected we can handle some of the support calls. At least, we can take the calls until we have some support people available. How can we contact you and the rest of the Crisis Management Team?"

"I'm afraid that you can't contact us at the moment," Pam replied. "Keep trying the mobile telephones though, just in case the networks come back on. As soon as we establish a command centre we'll contact you with the details."

When Pam got back to the small dining room she interrupted a discussion about where a command centre could be set up with the news from Dartford.

"OK," said Max, "I've come to a decision. The most important thing is to get our website and email up and running again, and to ensure that we can continue to run a customer services and support operation. We can do that with 20 spaces at Dartford, so that's going to be our recovery site. If our main offices look like being out of action for more than a week we'll get some portakabins installed."

"That's all very well," said Denis gloomily, "But how are we going to make all this happen. We can't contact anyone!"

"We can if we move to somewhere with telephones and an Internet connection," replied Max, "Especially if it's somewhere where we've got a copy of our plans. We might even get into a zone with mobile telephone coverage. I'm going to ring my wife, who should be at home in St Albans, and ask her to drive into London. She'll be able to pick 5 of us up in her car. We'll go back to my house and establish a temporary command centre from there. Peter, can you go to Dartford and fail-over the website and email systems?"

"Sorry," replied Peter, "I don't know how to do it. The details are in the ICT Recovery Plan, but I'd need Jane or one of her support engineers."

"OK," said Max, "You come with me and try and make contact with Jane or one of her support engineers. Angie, you'll need to find out what's happened to the staff, and then initiate the telephone cascade to let everyone know what's happening and where they should go. Roger, we'll need to get the external communications sorted, so you'd better come with me as well. Pam, you know more about this than the rest of us, so you'll be the fourth. I suggest that the rest of you head for home, as best you can, and contact me when you get there. By then we'll have sorted a few things out. Is that all clear?"

Everyone nodded in agreement. Pam, Roger, Peter, and Angie stayed in the private dining room whilst Max went to telephone his wife. The others got up and walked

out the room and then out of the restaurant, discussing what might be the best way to get to their respective homes, when the stations might re-open, and how far they might have to walk.

Fortunately, Max's wife was at home, and would meet Max at Swiss Cottage in about an hour. This was easily possible from St Albans, and would give Max and the others time to walk and/or get a bus to Swiss Cottage. It was now 3.30pm, by the time they'd get back to St Albans, it would probably be about 6pm. They had lost 5 vital hours.

Meanwhile, in an office in New York, Dan Vandyke had tried to access TopTek's website for the fifth time in an hour. He'd arrived at the office early to do a final check on the proposed contract with TopTek to install TopTek's flagship Internet security package on every one of his company's PCs and Servers worldwide. It was going to be TopTek's biggest contract to date, and would give them a key global customer in the work of banking.

Dan had been checking the details of the contract when he'd heard about the bombs in London, and as he'd just finished checking through TopTek's business continuity arrangements and guaranteed service levels, he wondered if they'd been affected. He quickly found a map of the area affected by the bombs on a news website, and sure enough, TopTek's headquarters was in one of the buildings that seem to have been damaged.

"Well," thought Dan, "This is a unique opportunity to see if TopTek can meet their guaranteed service levels in the event of a disruption."

At first Dan called TopTek's support desk – no reply. Then he tried their website, which was down. He then sent an email to Roger at TopTek asking if the bombs had affected them. He waited 10 minutes or so, and repeated the process.

"Hell," Dan said to himself after about an hour, "It looks like TopTek's down. I think I'd better put this contract on one side until we know what's happening."

Dan put all the contract papers back in the file and called the company's Chief Information Officer – the deal with TopTek would need to be revisited.

Across the other side of the Atlantic, at the same time as TopTek's biggest order to date, which Max thought was by now signed and sealed, was being questioned, Max and his reduced Crisis Management Team were climbing into his wife's car. The traffic was heavy travelling north towards St Albans with thousands of commuters being picked up by car, as there were still no trains running on the rail line through the City of London to the north.

By 6pm they were still short of their destination, but Angie suddenly noticed that she'd managed to get a signal on her mobile telephone.

"Hey!" Angie exclaimed, "The mobile's working. I'll call George to see what's happened to the staff."

George was Angie's second in command. He would have taken control of the HR aspects of dealing with the incident in Angie's absence. Peter checked his telephone for a signal, and immediately called Jane, his Operations Manager, but there was no reply and he was put through to her voice mail.

Max and Roger sat listening to the various telephone conversations as they checked the signals on their telephones. It was obvious that Peter hadn't managed to contact Jane, but Angie was excitedly asking George a whole string of questions. Max, Roger, and Peter anxiously tried to glean what was going on from the snippets of information given by Angie as she talked to George. After what seemed an age, she put the telephone down and turned to tell them the news.

"Max, what are we going to tell the media, our main shareholders and key customers? We'll have to change these messages before we send them out, and." said Roger, stopping in mid sentence as his face drained of all colour.

"And what?" asked Max in a concerned voice. "What's wrong Roger?"

"I've just remembered," said Roger. "Just before we went out to lunch I sent out the briefing packs for our ISO 22301 certification."

"Yes, so what's wrong?" asked Max again as he heard Pam utter a small groan as she realised what Roger was about to say.

"The briefing packs state that we have had our capability to manage a business disruption and protect TopTek's reputation and brand independently certified, and that this capability allows us to continue to supply our key products and services to our stated service levels after a disruption," Roger explained.

"And that," continued Pam on Roger's behalf, "is something that we are obviously failing to do, even if we get the telephones redirected and the website and email up and running again tomorrow morning."

Tomorrow was going to be a very long day.