Incident Management Systems: A Business Continuity Program Game-Changer
Incident management systems may be the best-kept secret in the business continuity world.

Organizations that have deployed these tools report 72% higher readiness than those who haven't, yet there still remains widespread confusion about what and who incident management systems are for. This confusion has slowed system adoption and advancement of overall business continuity program maturity.

According to a 2014 Disaster Recovery Preparedness benchmark survey, 75% of companies worldwide are failing at disaster readiness. Industry wide, there are many indicators that we have a long way to go.

Over half of all companies with established BC programs have no metrics in place for tracking success, and less than half are doing regular test exercises of their business continuity plans. Crisis or incident management (C/IM) systems can dramatically impact this trend. These tools are proven to boost BC/DR program success by:

- Standardizing processes
- Simplifying team training and test exercises
- Speeding access to plans and templates
- Improving communication speed and accuracy

This white paper will attempt to dispel the myths and confusion about incident management systems that have negatively impacted marketplace adoption. It will help readers better understand:

1. What exactly is an incident management system?
2. What types of organizations can benefit?
3. How to choose the right system for your needs?

Poised for Mainstream Adoption

In mid-2014, Gartner issued a Hype Report covering a wide variety of continuity management and IT disaster recovery solutions.

They rated the usefulness of crisis/incident management software at HIGH citing how these systems help organizations successfully manage unplanned events when they occur. In reviewing crisis/incident management solutions, Gartner focused on the following benefits:
35% of business continuity programs have deployed incident management systems...

- Tracking/management of workforce actions in response to an incident
- Managing crisis communications
- Effective response plan repository
- Simplifies training exercises
- Speeds workforce scheduling
- Supports regulatory reporting

They estimated that 35% of business continuity programs have already adopted incident management systems and predicted that these tools are poised for mainstream adoption by 2019.

Need for Better Process Standardization

In 2012 after a multi-year planning process, ISO 22301 was launched based on recognition of the need to create and ensure adoption of a set of standards for successful business continuity management. Incident management software is the best tool available to BC programs to speed adoption of a standardized approach and to ensure that plans that have been developed are actually put in use when an incident occurs.

Dispelling Marketplace Confusion

Gartner noted in their Hype Report that one of the main obstacles limiting more widespread adoption of incident management software is a lack of understanding of these solutions on behalf of BC/DR practitioners. One goal of this paper is to set the record straight on the role of C/IM sytems. Current marketplace confusion stems from several different misconceptions:
Many confuse incident management with emergency notification
Others assume incident management and business continuity planning tools perform the same function
Some assume incident management is for public sector response
Others believe it is only justified for enterprise-level operations

Incident Management vs. Emergency Notification Systems
It is not surprising that there is a lack of clarity as to the difference between incident management and emergency notification. Because communication plays a large role in incident management, many of the larger emergency notification players have marketed their notification platforms as incident management solutions.

One market-leader went as far as to define incident management as “Consistent, error-free messaging for all types of incidents.” This approach has done a huge disservice to the business continuity discipline as incident management functionality goes well beyond mere notification.

Incident Management vs. Business Continuity Planning Systems
Another common source of confusion lies in understanding the difference between business continuity planning tools and crisis/incident management systems. While both are highly useful tools for business continuity teams, they perform very different functions. BC planning tools facilitate the creation of business continuity plans, but do not play a role in the actual management of a crisis or event. C/IM tools are built to simplify the actual process of incident management. The chart below outlines the primary functionalities of the two types of tools, and, as is apparent, there is no real overlap.
Public vs. Private Sector Applications

If you do an internet search on the term “Incident Management System” it is true that top results are FEMA, Homeland Security, Ready.gov and USDA. Therefore, it’s not surprising that some consider C/IM systems tools to be aimed at the public sector. The truth is that, while these systems were initially adopted by public sector organizations, today they are used across a wide variety of industries for a wide variety of event types. Gartner estimates that approximately 35% of the likely target market has adopted incident management software.

Some of the primary private sector users include:

Enterprise Level vs. SMB Relevant

Industry is a much larger driver of incident management system adoption than company size. Any organization large enough to have a continuity plan in place can execute that plan better with an incident management solution. Because C/IM solutions do not require complex IT management and are quite affordable, they are not out of reach to smaller organizations. Also, since smaller organizations often lack dedicated resources for business continuity, they can benefit greatly from the structure that C/IM systems provide.

Process Standardization Across the Event Life Cycle

So now that we’ve clarified all things that incident management systems are not, it’s time to define exactly what they do and how they help drive business continuity program success.

In a nutshell, incident management systems help to ensure that your business continuity plans are followed in the way which they were designed. The system is built around your event plans, and supports the event team across each stage of the incident management life cycle.
When a team member launches an event, they immediately access all the resources previously created to best manage that event type. This includes team member contact information, task lists, project plans, alerts and more. All the tools they need to effectively communicate, assess risk and manage response.

All event team participants have access to a centralized dashboard which provides status and updates on each action to speed decision making and project management and to drive plan compliance. Once the event is completed, it is easy to evaluate and optimize the process and templates based on evaluation of the activity logs and team input.

Incident Management System Users Report
Higher Readiness

MissionMode has created a Readiness Assessment Survey to help organizations assess their level of readiness and benchmark versus others. The survey covers a wide variety of business continuity success factors including management support, number and types of plans created, frequency of test exercises performed and quality of support tools in place. To date, several hundred business continuity practitioners have completed the questionnaire and received their overall Readiness Scores.

72% higher readiness with C/IM systems
Respondents reporting use of incident management systems receive, on average, 72% higher Readiness Scores than those not employing C/IM tools.

This is a testament to the impact that C/IM has on business continuity program maturity.

Is a C/IM System Right for Your Organization?

Most organizations with established or even nascent business continuity programs can benefit from deploying an incident management system. To understand the value of a C/IM system for your organization, you should evaluate the following:

1. How effective is your current program?
2. How frequently do you activate your business continuity plans?
3. Are you in an industry that faces regulatory oversight?
4. Could you use the tools for both routine events and emergencies?

How Effective is Your Current Program?

If you don’t know how to answer this question, that should be a red flag. Mature business continuity programs have key performance metrics in place and are able to rate each test exercise or actual event in terms of compliance to the prescribed event plan, speed of task execution, effectiveness of communication and speed/success of issue resolution.
If your organization doesn't track success, doesn't perform test exercises or just isn't satisfied with the results, then you could definitely benefit from an incident management system.

**How Frequently Do You Activate Your Business Continuity Plans?**

On average MissionMode Readiness Survey respondents activate their business continuity plans over 40 times a year with weather, IT and power outages occurring with the greatest frequency.

How often you use your plans may be a function of how many different event types you have planned for. The top 10 most commonly planned events include:

- Severe Weather
- IT Outage/Breach
- Power Outage
- Natural Disaster
- Physical Violence
- Fire
- Epidemic
- Product Quality
- Scandal/Reputation Crisis
- Theft

The more active your business continuity program, the more benefit you will experience by employing an incident management system. Similarly, organizations with a wide variety and number of team members using a C/IM system will see significant gains in process standardization and compliance with BC plans.

**Does Your Industry Face Regulatory Oversight**

Transportation, construction, healthcare and utilities are just a few examples of industries with a heavy burden of regulatory reporting. It is no coincidence that this corresponds well with the list cited earlier of incident management system heavy users. That is because C/IM systems dramatically simplify the task of collecting, storing and sharing required operational logs which include both activity and alert reporting.

An incident management system tracks and time stamps all activity and communications. This information can be shared internally and with regulatory agencies as needed. It can be

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**Highly regulated organizations benefit even more**
archived for future retrieval as needed. Automating the task of creating required operational logs is a huge time-saver for organizations with this sort of regulation in place.

**Incident Management System for Routine Operations**

Many organizations that adopt C/IM systems for emergency management purposes find that these systems can be highly beneficial for routine operations management as well.

For instance, companies with SLA’s that require operational reporting find incident management systems very useful. Similarly, organizations with multiple shifts throughout the day find that these systems reduce the need for time consuming handoffs during shift changes. For teams that are geographically dispersed, C/IM systems can help keep all team members up to speed on project status. This can be especially helpful for global project teams that may have both language and time zone barriers. When assessing the value of a C/IM system for your organization, consider both the crises you need to be prepared to manage as well as the day-to-day activities that might benefit from a more systematic approach.

**Choosing the Right Incident Management System**

Once you’ve determined that your organization has much to gain from an incident management system, then comes the difficult task of selecting the right solution for your needs. Selecting the right incident management solution requires planning and research. To make the right selection you need to:

- Understand your needs
- Understand your users
- Understand your options

**Understanding Your Needs**

There are several aspects to defining your C/IM system needs. First off is the question of geography. If you need a fully global solution, you need to narrow your partner search to those that provide a global footprint and support.

Next you should determine what event types you plan to use the system for. Don't limit yourself to the confines of your current business continuity program plans. With an incident management system in place it is easier to expand the scope of events that your teams can handle.

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**Do your homework to select the right system for your needs**
Think big and be inclusive. Make sure all departments and business units that could ultimately make use of the solution are involved in the upfront decision. Inclusiveness will facilitate future adoption and drive cross-organization process standardization and cost savings down the line.

With the users and event types identified, you will be able to define the required feature set. The list below contains some of the most common features of incident management systems:

### Common Incident Management Features

- Cloud-based resource library
- Integrated emergency notification system
- Real-time chat / conference call
- Team and individual task checklists
- Status Reminders
- Real-time incident dashboard
- Customizable Templates
- Time/date stamped operational log
- Advanced mobile apps
- Ability to post from incident scene
- Electronic forms creation and management
- API integration toolkit
- Unlimited teams, devices, templates

#### Be inclusive when assessing C/IM system options to drive buy-in and adoption

**Understand Your Users**

For many MissionMode customers, ease of use is a primary driver of system selection. This is dictated by the number and technical proficiency of users. The more people that will be regularly using the system, the simpler it needs to be to limit required training time and the likelihood of user error. The more complicated the system, the slower the adoption curve will be with internal teams, and the harder it will be to drive standardization and plan compliance.

Again, when thinking about your users, take a macro view. You may be researching the solution for a single division or geographic region within an organization, but the more an organization globalizes their approach to business continuity, the better they tend to perform.

If your organization has already invested time and resources into creating BCM plans and processes, there will be little interest in recreating these to fit an inflexible system. Therefore to ensure buy-in, you need to evaluate the system’s ability to adapt to your processes and IT infrastructure without investment or rework.
That being said, if you haven’t already created BCM plans and processes, or if these are not being well deployed, you can leverage your incident management system to drive standardization.

**Understand Your Options**

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of selecting the right C/IM solution is gaining a understanding of marketplace options.

The C/IM market includes a wide variety of players some of which offer industry specific solutions and others who provide more general systems which can be applied across industry.

The industry-specific solutions tend to be aimed at public sector applications and environmental health and safety needs. If these are not applicable for your organization, then you will probably be looking for a general market system.

As stated before, geographic scope is another big consideration when narrowing the field of options you wish to consider. If you are a global company looking to standardize your business continuity program management approach worldwide, then finding a vendor that can support your global footprint is essential.

The next factor when creating your short list is the feature functionality offered. Based on your earlier needs assessment, you should have a strong feeling for what features you really need. Some market offerings have bells and whistles that will cost you extra, but may not be of value. The more you understand how you want to implement the solution, the easier it will be to zero in on those options with the features you need most. When assessing marketplace options, don’t limit your research to the biggest players – this could negatively impact your costs, your speed to deployment and, in some cases, the quality of support you receive. We recommend you consider vendors where incident management is one of their primary focuses, so that you can take advantage of best-of-breed development and frequent system updates.

**Do Deep Dive Demos**

Once you’ve narrowed the field to the solutions you believe best match your organization’s needs and budget, be sure to do multiple demonstrations to make sure you understand exactly how each system works. Include a broad spectrum of future users in the demos to ensure all important questions are addressed.
are asked and to drive buy-in for post deployment adoption. Take your time with these demonstrations to make sure you can assess exactly how the system will work for your processes.

Understand the Vendor Support Models

When it comes to incident management, you’re not just buying an off-the-shelf software solution. You need a vendor with the experience to customize their solution to your specific needs and to support your team with deployment.

Make sure you ask questions about deployment planning, training and integration support, and speak with current users to gauge both system and partner satisfaction. You need a partner that is dedicated to helping you get it right. Probe on the following to assess vendor support:

- Are they willing to do multiple demos across stakeholder groups?
- What is their deployment planning process?
- How do they help with system set up?
- What sort of training do they provide?
- Can they support your systems integration?
- What do they charge for deployment support?
- What happens post launch?
- Are their current customers satisfied?

Security and Reliability

As with any SaaS solution, you will need to be convinced that the C/IM system vendor you select has the system security, resiliency and redundancy you need to be sure their tools will be there when you need them. Your incident management system is for mission critical moments, and you need a vendor you can rely on. Ask for proof of both company and product stability, and understand what precautions they have in place to guarantee security and uptime. Finally, make sure they have an SLA that is in line with your needs.
Incident Management ROI

The business case for incident management software is an easy one. Benefits come from improved internal efficiencies, including:

- Business continuity process automation
- Faster communications and decision making
- Reduced meetings/conference calls
- Built-in logs/reporting

Harder to quantify, yet even more critical is the improved organizational resiliency that comes from deploying a C/IM solution. Remember, 75% of organizations today are failing at disaster preparedness, yet companies with an incident management system in place are reporting 72% higher readiness. C/IM systems arm your business continuity teams for success.
About MissionMode

Since 2003, MissionMode has been changing the game when it comes to crisis communications and incident management. Our emergency notification and incident management applications are easy to use when the pressure is on, yet advanced enough to be trusted during the toughest disasters. That's why industry-leading organizations around the world depend on our web-based (SaaS) solutions to reduce response costs, boost operational efficiency, increase safety, reduce legal risks and protect lives. They also rely on us for exceptional service with a personal touch.

While a lot of companies claim to support incident management, only MissionMode provides true operational control through an end-to-end solution. MissionMode’s incident management approach goes well beyond emergency notification because in a crisis, you don't just need to communicate the issue, you need to resolve it. MissionMode provides the tools business continuity teams need for effective crisis resolution, making managing disruptive events faster, easier and more effective. Tools that take business continuity plans off the shelf and put them at your team's fingertips for superior operational readiness.