

UNITIL ENERGIZES BUSINESS CONTINUITY FOR GREATER RESILIENCE



As an electric and natural gas utility serving customers in three New England states, **Unitil** is acutely aware of the impact storms can have. With a company culture that prioritizes emergency response, every employee has an alternate assignment during storm events and other natural disasters to assure a fast, effective response and rapid service restoration for customers.

To assure the resilience of its own critical systems and processes, **Unitil** approaches its business continuity (BC) program with the same dedication. In addition to its own BC activities, the company recently consulted with longtime partner ROI Communications, who recommended and engaged **Sungard Availability Services®** (Sungard AS) consultants to review its BC plans and guide investments to become even more resilient in the face of the unexpected.

RESULTS

- Clear direction for BC program structure, plans and next steps
- Validated and refined BC plans
- A holistic view of BC risks and priorities across all departments
- Targeted investments to achieve higher levels of resilience

SERVICES

Business Continuity Consulting

- Review existing BC program policy and framework
- Conduct Business Impact Analysis
- Develop BC plans for 19 different business areas
- Prepare a comprehensive DR plan
- Conduct plan validation exercise
- Create detailed report with recommendations for next steps



ABOUT Unitil

Unitil is a public utility holding company with affiliates that serve approximately 105,000 electric customers and 81,300 natural gas customers in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

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Jacklyn Ulban
Manager of Business Resiliency
and Compliance, Unitil



THE CHALLENGE



TAKING BUSINESS CONTINUITY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

When a 2008 ice storm devastated the above-ground utility infrastructure across the U.S. northeast, it left millions without power. Like other New England utility companies, Unitil dealt with the extensive damage. Taking the lessons learned to heart, in 2009 the company established a dedicated team to focus exclusively on emergency management and business continuity as part of a multi-year plan.

The team's first order of business was to reinvent the emergency response structure and culture across Unitil, establishing the storm roles that still exist for every employee today, reinforced by ongoing training and periodic drills and exercises.

As an electric and gas company charged with delivering 24/7/365 service, Unitil knew its business operations needed to be equally resilient. The team's business continuity (BC) efforts focused primarily on critical process recovery, while addressing the growth, IT

complexity and regulatory challenges common to many organizations.

"Unitil had grown through acquisitions, and we were managing BC plans for multiple operating companies and a mix of modern applications and legacy systems—plus assuring compliance with three different state utility regulators," says Jacklyn Ulban, Manager of Business Resiliency and Compliance at Unitil.

"Over several years, we built a solid framework for ongoing management of our BC program and plans," she continues. "In 2017, we were ready to bring in some external expertise to help us take the program to the next level. Our goal was to gain a holistic view of the BC program across all Unitil business areas and to set priorities for next steps. We looked at several third-party consultants and Sungard AS was the one that stood out. They demonstrated both the business continuity and disaster recovery expertise we needed."

THE SOLUTION



ASSESSING THE EXISTING PROGRAM

Ulban worked closely with Sungard AS consultants to ensure the project scope aligned with specific Unitil objectives. Following a kickoff meeting with the Unitil leadership team, the consultants reviewed the existing BC program.

Through interviews and research into the company's systems and processes, the consultants found a program that was running well, backed with a sophisticated SharePoint repository that housed BC plan templates and drove stakeholder collaboration. Further, they found that the program adhered to the requirements of the ISO 22301 standard for business continuity management systems.

The initial gap analysis—documenting applications and systems and the DR support that IT currently provided for each—was another important milestone.

"Their assessment was a validation of the years of work by many people to get the company to that point. It confirmed that we really had a good framework in place, and helped clarify what we needed to do to take it a step further."

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS, ANALYZING IMPACT

Next, Sungard AS consultants conducted workshops with department leaders and key staff members across 19 business areas. The consultants applied a structured approach and proven methods to draw out critical information, then organized the results into two key documents: a Business Impact Analysis (BIA), and the initial drafts of the BC plans.

The BIA identified and documented the critical processes for each business area, their corresponding recovery requirements, and the operational and financial impact if those processes were interrupted. It also considered the impact on Unitil's customer service, contractual requirements and reputation, along with legal and regulatory concerns.

"We asked Sungard AS to focus on specific areas already identified as either the most critical, the most vulnerable, or the most highly impactful," says Ulban. "We had all of this expertise and institutional knowledge in the room and the interviews were a huge learning opportunity. We were asking the process owners to take a step back and look at their operations—and also step up and take responsibility for their critical processes."

With the BIA, Unitil gained an essential foundation for the updated BC plans, as well as a way to prioritize future IT investments in disaster recovery.

THE SOLUTION (continued)



DEVELOPING BC PLANS

The first plan that Sungard AS submitted for review covered a critical Unitil department: Customer Service. “We were very excited to see the quality and completeness of the plan,” says Ulban.

Unitil’s engineering department and its gas and electric operations functions required especially detailed BC plans, and the Sungard AS team pursued all the granular detail required to develop robust plans.

Plan development and refinement took place in early 2018, as each group of stakeholders reviewed their plans and worked with Ulban and Sungard AS to add and clarify content. Curious process owners also wanted to see what the other departments were saying was important to them. “There was a lot of collaboration after the interviews between process owners and especially with IT, where sharing knowledge helped uncover interdependencies and resolve open questions so we could update their plans and move on,” says Ulban.

PUTTING PLANS TO THE TEST

Once all the BC plans were reviewed and updated, it was time to test and validate business recovery strategies and capabilities. Ulban and Sungard AS designed a disruptive incident that would impact as many departments as possible. Process owners knew in advance there would be an exercise, but did not know the nature of it. Sungard AS conducted training sessions with process owners in advance to refresh all participants on how to use their plans.

The test scenario centered on an early-morning fire that would affect two areas in Unitil’s Hampton, NH headquarters building—which also housed the primary data center. Employees arriving to work could not enter the building, due to the prospective smoke and water damage that would leave both business and IT operations out of commission for two to four weeks. “We run a number of exercises and evacuation drills each year, but this was the first time we told people they couldn’t go back in the building,” says Ulban.

With their BC plans in hand, process owners worked together to address issues presented in the exercise. IT could follow its plans to bring up critical applications in the Concord, NH recovery data center 50 miles away. Unitil’s observers and the Sungard AS team watched the interaction and logged nine key observations that would require follow-up action.

RESULTS



A CLEAR PATH TO RESILIENCE

Through its work with Sungard AS, Unitil gained BC plans for 19 business units and a DR plan for IT operations, each essential to achieving its overarching goal—to encompass all the discrete BC deliverables into a holistic, company-wide business resilience mission.

The final report Sungard AS submitted serves as a critical management tool to help Unitil make informed decisions on overall program priorities and next steps. Unitil is already pursuing its topmost priority—deploying a new highly redundant phone system for its customer call centers. Unitil again sought guidance from telecom solutions provider ROI Communications, which assisted with integration strategy, network design and RFP development.

Looking back on the project just completed with Sungard AS, Ulban reflects on her collaboration with Sungard AS. “Our Sungard AS consultants were very

knowledgeable. They understood our business even when we got down into detailed operational discussions,” she says. “The whole interview process with key stakeholders was a great success. The consultants knew when to proactively drive us forward, as well as when to step back when we needed them to. It was a wonderful experience overall.”

Ulban is particularly pleased with the level of engagement the project inspired with the process owners across Unitil. “Business continuity is never that important until you need it, and I’m well aware that people have competing priorities and tend to put BC on the back burner,” she says. “For Unitil, having a culture of people working through emergencies means that people are able to jump out of their normal job and embrace something different—and that’s exactly what they did to make this BC project successful.”

“Business resiliency is all about continuous improvement. It’s about planning the strategy and mitigation for an interruption, while at the same time looking forward and saying, ‘What can we do to prevent this in the future?’”

Jacklyn Ulban
Manager of Business Resiliency and Compliance
Unitil

With any BC program, overall success depends on meticulous requirements gathering and analysis, followed by detailed planning. For Unitil, the Sungard AS consulting engagement yielded a final report, including these elements to help business and IT leaders make informed decisions about their resilience and recovery initiatives.

- Detailed recommendations for eight BC program initiatives with prioritization based on risk, effort and cost
- Company-wide view of business activities and their Maximum Acceptable Outages (MAO)
- A recovery sequence for key systems, based on MAO
- Analysis of Application Recovery Time Objectives (RTOs)
- Analysis of Recovery Point Objectives (RPOs) for data
- Analysis of more than 80 applications highlighting potential gaps between application RTOs and the actual capabilities of Unitil IT and its cloud-based application providers

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