

Is Business Continuity Certification Right for Your Organization?



An Avaluation Consulting White Paper

This white paper analyzes the business case for pursuing organizational business continuity certification, including what it takes to complete the certification process and how best to begin preparing.

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As the business continuity management discipline has matured over the past twenty years, a number of standards development organizations developed and introduced numerous standards and organizational certification offerings. Some standards are offered by industry specific organizations, such as the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council (FFIEC). Other standards have been developed by independent, consensus-based organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the British Standards Institute (BSI), ASIS International and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The private sector has developed business continuity programs based on these standards to gain business advantages ranging from regulatory compliance to satisfying aggressive customer demands. Unfortunately, the lack of conformity among the standards – both in terms of approach and terminology – fails to provide a common measurement tool, making it difficult to identify and articulate the quality of an organization’s business continuity effort. Whether responding to a customer inquiry or a request from internal management, most business continuity professionals struggle to clearly demonstrate their organization’s program competency.

A potential solution to this problem is an organizational certification based on a comprehensive and generally-accepted standard. The chosen standard should provide a common set of objectives, terminology and processes for organizational consideration. Additionally, the standard should provide a level of compliance assurance toward commonly-accepted principles, as well as enable continuous improvement, long-term viability and repeatability.

This white paper analyzes the business case for pursuing organizational business continuity certification, including what it takes to complete the certification process and how best to begin preparing.

What is the Value of Certification?

Business continuity remains a fragmented discipline, with programs implemented based on numerous standards containing varying degrees of depth and rigor. Certification to an accepted standard provides an objective measure of an organization’s program and removes doubt concerning the quality of business continuity planning efforts. Certification may add value to your organization in the following five ways:

1. Not only can certification provide an organization with a strong competitive differentiator, but it can also provide potential customers with the means to make a solid, straightforward comparison between organizations. For existing customers, certification can provide a degree of assurance, which is critically important if your organization is operating as a single or sole source provider of a critical product or service and your customers have expressed concern and are evaluating secondary sources.
2. Related to competitive differentiation, certification will provide a convenient and time-saving answer to frequent business continuity program surveys and inquiries from customers, as well as regulators, investors and insurance carriers. With the existence of a third-party registered certification, there is no longer a need to share proprietary planning information to satisfy continuity inquires and concerns. Certification may also begin to offer direct cost-savings opportunities on a recurring basis. Industry associations are in the process of debating the direct benefits of “viable” business continuity programs on credit ratings and business interruption insurance premiums.
3. The organizational certification process also introduces discipline, holding the organization accountable to consistent focus and participation in a life-cycle oriented business

continuity planning effort. With employee turnover always a concern, organizational certification (and the inherent requirements that mandate system documentation, accountability, repeatability, continual improvement and evidence) will enable an effective knowledge transfer process.

4. Also from an internal perspective, developing business continuity processes and capabilities in accordance with a standard provides the program owner with the ability to easily and confidently answer management questions regarding the state of the program. Questions such as “What’s everyone else doing?” or “Are we doing everything we should be?” can be clearly quantified and answered through reference to the standard. Program weaknesses and non-conformities will be highlighted during initial and continuing certification audits, which can then be built upon to show progress. Additionally, for organizations with decentralized business continuity planning processes, audits will encourage compliance, ensure conformity across the organization and act as a catalyst for continuous improvement.
5. Some standards, in particular British Standard (BS) 25999, provide planning strategies, risk management methodologies and risk treatment approaches that offer program optimization and continuous improvement opportunities – similar to other standards that follow management system concepts. These structures can assist organizations working to integrate a business continuity management system (BCMS) into a larger enterprise risk management program. This value alone – whether the organization is interested in certification or not – demands that organizations utilize a structure that shares terminology and processes across a multitude of risk management disciplines.

Certification may or may not provide value for your organization. Review *Table 1* to determine if your organization should consider business continuity certification.

Table 1 – Determining if Certification is Right for Your Organization

Strength of Criteria	Criteria Influencing The Certification Decision-Making Process
<input type="checkbox"/> (Strong)	Customer Demand You’re a single or sole source provider and wish to retain that status.
<input type="checkbox"/> (Strong)	Differentiation in the Marketplace Your business development team feels that business continuity capabilities may be a competitive differentiator in your marketplace, and your leadership team desires to increase market share.
<input type="checkbox"/> (Moderate)	Cost Savings Opportunities A proven business continuity management capability may provide business interruption premium savings or influence more favorable credit ratings.
<input type="checkbox"/> (Moderate)	Senior Leadership Inquiries Management displays a strong interest in business continuity readiness or requests benchmarking data or third party attestation to confirm the viability of the investment made to date. They may also want answers to the following questions, which standard and certification may help answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s everyone else doing?

Strength of Criteria	Criteria Influencing The Certification Decision-Making Process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we doing everything we should be doing? • What are our primary program weaknesses?
<input type="checkbox"/> (Moderate)	Maintaining Focus The business continuity team struggles with achieving continuous commitment (and improvement) in a decentralized program where the business participates in planning and plan maintenance efforts.
<input type="checkbox"/> (Weak)	Integration The business is struggling with collapsing risk management boundaries and is looking to proactively manage risk, not just react to it (resilience versus simple recoverability).
<input type="checkbox"/> (Weak)	Life-cycle Concept Specific to business continuity, the organization struggles with putting the pieces together and is searching for a standard to model after.

What Organizational Certifications are Available?

Several business continuity-related certification programs are currently available. Determining which certification is right for an organization depends on the organization’s industry and their operational goals. *Table 2* highlights four different standards, three of which are currently certifiable. The table also provides guidance on which would be the most appropriate, depending on an organization’s characteristics and business objectives.

Table 2 – Current and Possible Future Organizational Certifications

Title	Description	Status	Applies To...	Choose Because...
BS 25999	End-to-end business continuity management system standard focusing on risk treatment, response and recovery strategies – equally	Available as of November 2007	Global entities, but applicable to all organizations (large, small, public and private) anywhere in the world	Organizations focusing on enterprise risk management concepts with aggressive domestic risk management demands or international business interests
Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP)	NEMA-originated certification process focused on assisting local governments with developing and measuring the effectiveness of emergency management strategies (based on NFPA 1600)	Available as of September 2007	State and local governments	Government leaders interested in measuring progress toward an actionable response and recovery strategy
ISO 27001	Information security management system certification program which addresses business continuity and disaster recovery	Available as of April 2006	Organizations seeking certification of security processes, with a “minor” in business continuity	Primary business driver is an interest in security program enhancement and certification

Title	Description	Status	Applies To...	Choose Because...
ASIS SPC.1.2009	A standard focuses on organizational resilience, strongly emphasizing the prevention of downtime, as well as the recovery from disruptive events	Standard available as of March 2009, certification not yet available	All organizations (large, small, public and private) anywhere in the world	The organization is seeking formal resilience oriented processes, with a potential for future certification in this broader risk management discipline

Although Table 2 focuses on four standards, three of which currently offer certification, three other topics related to organizational certification must be addressed for clarification purposes.

First, other complementary certification programs are under development. One such program is found under Public Law 110-53, specifically the Voluntary Private Sector Preparedness Accreditation and Certification Program (PS-Prep) in Title IX of this law. Title IX directs the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create and implement a voluntary preparedness certification program that promotes private sector preparedness. On October 15, 2009, DHS published a notice in the Federal Register seeking public comment on the three standards identified for adoption under the PS-Prep Program, which include:

- ASIS International SPC.1-2009
- British Standard 25999-2:2007
- National Fire Protection Association 1600:2007

The [public comment](#) period will close November 15, 2009, at which time it is expected that ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) will move forward toward the development of certification processes for each of the three standards noted above. In the future, additional standards may be added to the program, but for now, it is likely the PS-PREP Program will include these three standards.

Second, a “popular” standard in the United States (available in multiple international versions) not mentioned in the table above is NFPA 1600. NFPA 1600 offers enterprise-wide emergency management and business continuity concepts and recommendations. Although it is now being considered for inclusion in the PS-Prep Program, it is not currently offered as a certifiable organizational standard. A number of business continuity services firms, as well as internal audit departments, build and review business continuity programs based on the NFPA 1600 standard. Despite not currently certifiable, NFPA 1600 continues to serve as a model for organizations to work toward.

Third, business continuity service providers and organizations have created maturity models to measure progress toward a desired level of preparedness. Although third-parties can audit a business program based on the tenets of a maturity model, this is not presently considered a recurring form of organizational certification.

What to Certify?

Generally speaking, most certification registrars offer specific guidelines as to the scope of the certification process. For example, an organization can achieve BS 25999 certification for any of the following:

- The organization as a whole;
- A location; or
- A business unit.

However, as an example, a specific product or service cannot be the scope of a BS 25999 certification effort. *Table 3* outlines the three certification scope options mentioned above and the suggested criteria to assist in decision making.

Table 3 – BS 25999 Certification Scope Options

✓	Scope	Criteria To Influence Scoping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enterprise Wide	The organization is tightly integrated and it is nearly impossible to differentiate or remove less critical locations or lines of business from the certification process. Additionally, all aspects of the organization follow the spirit and intent of the standard consistently.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Location	Senior management (or a customer) is able to pinpoint specific locations deemed critical to product or service delivery and/or are material to the organization's well-being. Select locations are chosen if a finite number of facilities offer competitive differentiation and align to a stakeholder's specific expectation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Line of Business	Senior management (or a customer) is able to pinpoint specific lines of business where competitive differentiation is possible or where certification should be pursued.

Overall, careful consideration should be given to not only the value of working toward organizational certification, but also what the scope of the certification should be. This decision-making process impacts the value of the certification, as well as the cost associated with obtaining the certification. Starting with a smaller scope may be a way to begin integrating certification into a BCMS with lower costs. However, it is important to not create too much differentiation between program elements across the organization.

What's Required to Complete the Certification Process?

For most standards, preparing for certification requires time, effort, focus and commitment – no matter how ready one may feel their organization is for certification. We have found that there are five key success factors that can ease the preparation process. These success factors are:

- ✓ Management commitment to develop, operate and continuously improve the BCMS
- ✓ Time and resources necessary to meet the requirements noted in the standard
- ✓ Time commitment to participate in the audit process, providing documentation and answering examiner inquires
- ✓ Time and resources necessary to address audit issues (non-conformities)
- ✓ Budget for audit fees, which includes the first assessment, as well as recurring surveillance audits throughout the certification period

The success factor that most organizations underestimate is the time commitment to prepare documentation for the audit process. Although it is not typically the most time consuming activity, it is rare that this type of documentation has been thoroughly or adequately prepared. In order to prove compliance, detailed descriptive documentation is required. Documentation must show how the organization meets the spirit or intent of the standard, how the organization delivers repeatable outcomes when compared to its unique BCMS, and how management approves analyses, strategies and test results (to name a few).

How to Begin Preparing?

For some organizations, particularly those new to business continuity, preparation will take time and resources. However, whether new to business continuity or part of a strong, mature program, consider each of the following ten points as you prepare for organizational certification.

1. Identify the most appropriate standard and certification process. Obtain a copy of the standard and any material that provides assistance with the certification process.
2. Develop the certification value proposition and begin “selling” individually to those who may benefit most from organization certification (sales, strategic planners, supply chain and executive management).
3. Determine the appropriate scope of certification.
4. Develop a project plan / program charter to prepare for certification. Gain approval and support from key management personnel.
5. Develop program documentation consistent with the standard, including a policy, standard operating procedures, scope statement and objectives listing.
6. Perform required activities resulting from new processes outlined in the program documentation. Some organizations may be able to move forward to the next step, a self-assessment, prior to beginning any new program activities.
7. Perform a self-assessment or identify a qualified firm to perform a certification readiness assessment, specific to the scope of the certification you’re planning to pursue.
8. Perform any or all aspects of your BCMS required to close the gaps from the assessment. For organizations with mature business continuity processes, this may include re-performing activities so they align with the standard’s requirements or so the proper documentation is completed to prove compliance.
9. Ensure all major gaps have been closed, and ensure the organization has a strong corrective actions / preventative actions handling process to address future improvement opportunities or compliance issues.
10. Develop an RFP and submit to a registrar, confirming scope and resource requirements. Schedule the certification process with the certifying body when management feels ready.

Note: Avalution Consulting and BSI Americas recently released the second edition of their joint white paper “[How to Deploy BS 25999](#)”. This white paper provides a more in depth look at this specific standard and the BSI certification process.

Conclusions

Organizational business continuity certification offers the opportunity for market differentiation, cost savings and increased levels of program readiness for organizations of all sizes and in all industries.

Beyond the certification process, make sure your organization is prepared to take advantage of the actual certification. Market this capability, but of equal importance, demand the same level of readiness from your supply chain. Share preparedness standards, concepts and techniques, and work with your most critical suppliers to achieve higher levels of preparedness.

About Avalution Consulting

Avalution Consulting specializes in business continuity strategy design, development, implementation and long-term program maintenance. Working with Avalution immediately affects the quality, focus and strategic alignment of your organization's risk management and planning efforts.

Avalution is also recognized as a participant in the BSI Americas Associate Consultant Program (ACP). BSI Americas administers the ACP program in order to provide a list of consulting organizations who are "credible and offer an acceptable service in terms of value and performance." As a certified firm, Avalution assists in preparing organizations for BS 25999 certification as well as assessing readiness for the certification process.

In addition to Avalution's project-focused work, their team of professionals is experienced in the delivery of long-term program management solutions. Due to their clients' resource and time constraints, Avalution is able to assist with the execution of recurring business continuity lifecycle tasks, to include testing, training and program maintenance activities. Avalution's professionals are requested in the toughest of situations – aggressive business objectives, resource constraints, immediate need, and of course, the struggle with getting started. They coach, implement and above all, stay engaged to support your evolving needs – before and during crises.

Avalution's professionals deliver proven strategies that decrease the likelihood of business failure and minimize impact should the unforeseeable occur.

For additional information regarding their professionals, tools and solutions please contact Avalution at 800.941.0381 or via email at contactus@avalution.com.