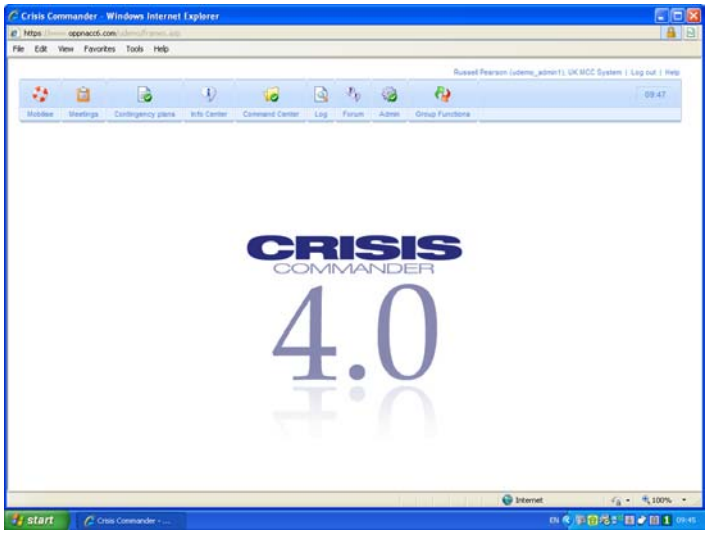
Product Test Lab

Crisis Management Software Crisis Commander

Crisis Management Systems – the kind that serve as a front end or dashboard to manage a number of emergency related functions – can be very important in a disaster or disruption to normal business services. Not many are currently on the market, so when CPM Global Assurance (CPM) had the opportunity to review Crisis Commander, we were eager to get a closer look.

The developers describe Crisis Commander (CC) as a communication, collaboration and incident management system. The product was originally developed in Sweden back in 2001, and is sold internationally through a network of appointed distributors and has over 300 customers to date including Dunn & Bradstreet, Siemens, Nissan, Betfair, Bosch, City of London, bmi Airline, Volvo, the Swedish Parliament, Skandia Banken, Vin & Spirit (makers of Absolut Vodka), and Telia (the largest Scandinavian phone company).



Customers in the USA, Sweden, Germany, Norway, Denmark, the UK and Japan, currently use Crisis Commander. As with many comparable products today, CC uses the Internet (via software as a service) as part of its operating infrastructure. It integrates databases of emergency team members with emergency response plans, contact lists and disaster recovery plans, and includes an optional integrated emergency notification SMS and Email messaging (with optional Voice, Conference Call and Voicebank) to provide a single-source crisis response and management tool.

Owing to the products scalability and pricing structure, Crisis Commander is ideal for medium to large organisations. The system is conceptually very straightforward.

Once the various databases are created, access levels and permissions are established, and supporting plan documentation is in place, the system is ready for use. A two level hierarchy can be created, depending on how the crisis management functions are deployed. A Master Control Centre (MCC) version provides oversight and coordination of other Crisis Commander (CC) systems that are linked via the internet.

This way, a large organisation can address multiple incidents or a single incident that effects multiple locations. The local distributor collaborates with clients to set up the system, including database creation, calling list creation, message creation, and plan documentation.

Notification schemes for different emergency scenarios can be pre-programmed, which is very important. The only element the client needs is a standard Web browser. Clients can custom-tailor the system to their own unique requirements, if needed. However, the value of this kind of arrangement is that the equipment is not on site, which means it is less at risk in the event of an emergency.

The size and the complexity of the system configuration, including database preparation, list creation and other administrative activities, determine the price and installation interval.

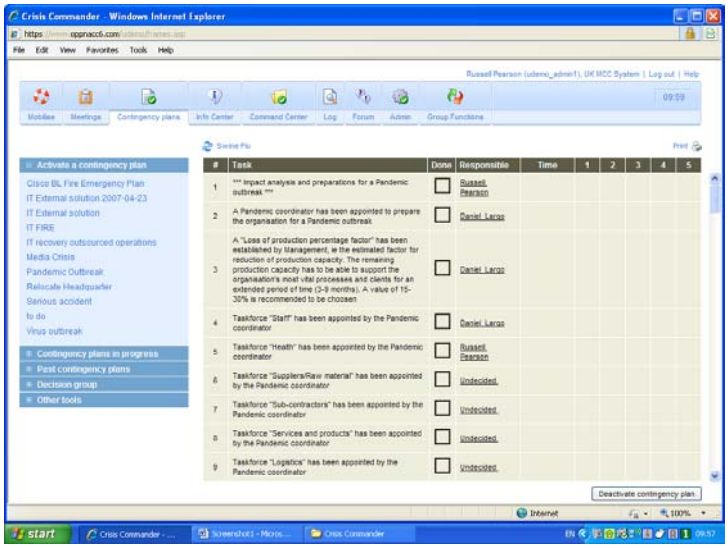
When implementing Crisis Commander, the local distributor staff members gather data from the customer and assist with developing the various databases and other options and provide system training. Although the company emphasises the fact that most everything needed for implementation is available from the Web, hard copy installation and administration guides are available just in case. The system is easy to learn and the company provides demos and other tools to facilitate the learning process.

CPM was concerned about how the developers of CC handle its own business continuity as customers depend on availability of the CC resource. We asked several questions about the developer's infrastructure; here's what we learned:

1. Currently data centres are located in the USA, UK and Europe; all centres networked together
2. For local access diversity, CC uses diversely routed fibre facilities
3. Two separate physical access points into each data centre
4. Three Internet access and voice/text communication providers
5. Multiple levels of primary/back up power, including emergency power from diesel generators
6. Redundant hardware and security components
7. Complies with Information Security Management ISO 27001

Installation

CPM participated in a walkthrough of the Crisis Commander Installation process. The principal installation activities are defined in this paragraph. Once the basic system has been configured, users define their own crisis situations, e.g. IT failure, HQ relocation, pandemic outbreak, serious accident, production or media. Next, they appoint members of their crisis teams and assign access parameters. Next, up to two crisis command centres can be defined, including the equipment and facilities configured in each, Users then create notification routines, based on the defined scenarios.



Assuming a crisis or business disruption occurs, a series of meetings usually convenes to address the situation. CC helps pre configure the meetings agenda, desired outcome and other relevant information. CC provides an easy set of tools for identifying and specifying the location and emergency response kits, critical documentation (e.g. insurance papers) and initial instructions to select individuals or teams (e.g. crisis management team, switchboard operators, security guards, stakeholders, staff).

Documents supporting these functions can be easily created and uploaded to the system for later use, along with an all important version control feature. Once these preliminary activities have been completed, users then create mobilisation plans, which specify action steps for team members in a logical chronological sequence. Again, any documents created in support of the mobilisation plan can be uploaded to the system. Dozens of different plan templates are available.

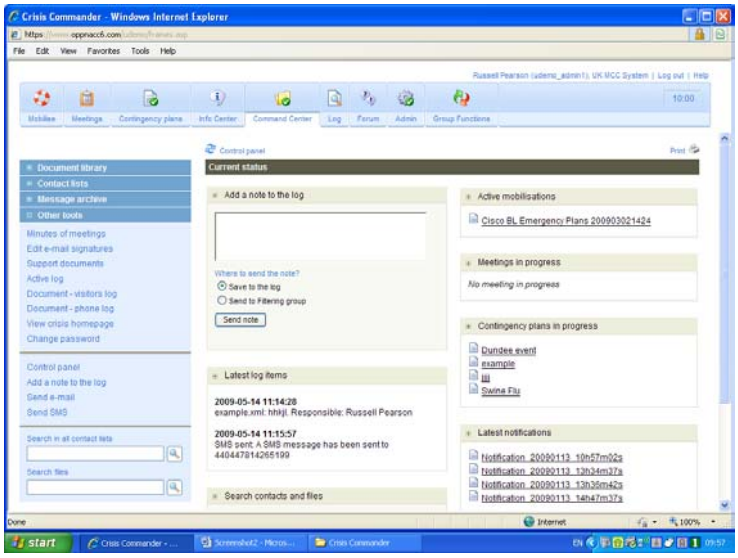
Creation of contact lists is next; numerous options are available, including senior management, staff customers, emergency responders and the media. These can be built as documents or spreadsheets, depending on user needs. Any additional documents necessary for the responses can next be uploaded into various storage areas via the Document Library.

CC facilitates the creation of press releases often one of the most important – and most difficult – activities during a crisis. Simply pull down the template, enter the relevant data, validate it and send to the preset list of media contacts. As mentioned earlier, CC also supports email. You and your team can create email signatures in advance. Next, the system looks for assignment of the overall incident commander, with that person's contact details. CC has a series of embedded contingency plan templates. Use these to customise a specific process-level response following the onset of a crisis. CC can even provide timed reminders (version control) for plan elements or documents needing to be updated.

A normal CC installation typically takes one to three weeks depending on the application's size and complexity. Access to the system during the installation process is via a standard web browser with suitable security. Data for the installation can be imported via standard Excel spreadsheets. Application programming interfaces (APIs) that link with customer systems such as a human resources or business continuity planning software (e.g. PeopleSoft or LDRPS) are available. Users can participate in the data collection processes needed. The system administrator manages post installation activities via a Web based administrator interface.

Operation

Crisis Commander operates around the clock, and is available when needed via internet access from any https enabled browser device. The main menu has nine functions across the top of the main page: Mobilise (launch crisis response), Meetings (convene team meetings), Contingency Plans (launch plans), Info centre (messages), Command centre (overall response management and coordination), Log (system activity logs), Forum (discussion area), Admin (system management) and Logout. Going from left to right across the top navigation bars facilitates the crisis response function.



In a disaster or crisis situation, users must have access to the Internet, if that is not possible users can also contact CC by phone to launch a response.

The system also permits users to convert plans and meetings automatically into word files that mimic certain system functions; these must be prepared in advance. These files can serve as backups if the Internet is down, since various scenarios have been pre-programmed users can select the one that is most relevant, and the system takes care of sending the message in the desired medium, collecting responses, and providing status reports. Users receive notification via primary and alternate email addresses, fixed and mobile phones, fax, short message service (SMS), Blackberry™, iphone™ and pagers. Messages will be retried until a response is received or a pre-set threshold is achieved. The system provides regular status updates in real-time. Two recent features include an optional conference call and voicebank. You can use the conference call bridge to allow several individuals across multiple sites to share information in real-time and record the conference meeting if required. Voicebank is a 'Noticeboard' messaging service that allows your business and staff to leave messages such as Press Releases, Public Announcements, Product Updates, Security Information and Staff Notification. The messages can be recorded remotely by anyone with access to the passcode using any touch tone phone or set automatically via the notification tool. Callers can then phone in and listen to those messages usually played most recent first, but with the ability to skip back and forth. Older recordings can remain on the service for the caller to listen to after hearing those that are most up to date.

Documentation

Crisis Commander requires only a web browser for operation, and offers on-line assistance either via the system or via live technical support. Hardcopy installation and administration guides are also available.

Usefulness in a Disaster Situation

Assuming users have access to a PC/laptop, PDA, Smartphone, Blackberry™ or telephone they can access Crisis Commander. CPM liked the system's simplicity and how quickly a virtual crisis command centre can be activated.

We recommend using Crisis Commander as a key element in a business continuity or crisis management programme. It is also an excellent tool for conducting and evaluating crisis exercises.

In CPM's opinion, Crisis Commander provides an excellent tool for disaster response, crisis management and emergency notification activities. The user interface is simple yet very effective, the installation process is straightforward, the system runs 24x7, has a powerful log/audit trail (for post event analysis) and delivers as promised. If you need a virtual crisis command centre capability to enhance your business continuity activities, CPM recommends you carefully investigate Crisis Commander.

Product Name	Crisis Commander (Version 4.0)
Company	Crisis Commander Ltd
Address	19a Goodge Street, London, W1T 2PH
Contact	Sales
Phone	0207 1121 998
E-mail	info@crisiscommander.co.uk
Website	www.crisiscommander.co.uk
Price	From $1650 per month (£995 per month) for ASP version. Pricing includes all maintenance and upgrades (one per year), 5 user IDs, 200 MBs of data storage, DR protection and SLA. Additional user IDs and storage are available. Discounts available for multi-system installations.
Distribution	Safeguard Communications is the UK and EMEA distributor
Training	On-site training is available
Warranty	Product availability and functionality guaranteed for the life of the contract as per the SLA
Maintenance	Support available via e-mail and 24/7 telephone
System Environment	Secure https access via MS Explorer 5.5 or higher, Mozilla or any browser-based Smart Phone, PDA, Iphone™ or BlackBerry™
Installation	Installation performed by Safeguard Communications
Competition	Strohl Systems Incident Manager, Recovery Planner, Shadow Planner

Ratings

	Poor *	Fair **	Average ***	Very Good ****	Excellent ****
Installation				****	
Documentation				****	
Usefulness				****	
Value for Money					*****
Overall Rating				****	
Operation					*****