

Ask the Executive: Interview with Doni Perry

By Peter Laz, Forsythe

Doni Perry is the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of Sea Star Line, LLC. Joining Sea Star Line, LLC in 2004, he has been instrumental in the maturing of Sea Star Line's IT vision and development of their business continuity and disaster planning posture. He holds an MBA from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Bachelor's of Science from The Citadel: The Military College of South Carolina. Prior to joining Sea Star, Mr. Perry worked for a consulting firm specializing in outsourcing, security, and IT asset management.

Sea Star Line, LLC is a privately held company providing integrated transportation services between the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Sea Star is the only ocean carrier in the trade between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Laz: Can you describe how IS supports the business?

Perry: Touching virtually every aspect of our business, IT is increasingly taking on a larger and larger role in our organization. With this increased dependency, our business partners have come to expect and demand reliable IT services.

Four years ago, we established a technology vision that simply stated "Develop and deploy IT systems that the users can rely on and trust (Integrity), have transparency of information throughout the organization (Visibility), are easy and intuitive to use (Simplicity) and that increase the velocity in which information was available.(Speed)."

Laz: I can see how such a vision for IT would require a viable recovery capability. Was that vision a driver and what other drivers did Sea Star Line have for developing a BC/DR capability?

Perry: Yes. Maintaining our vision of Integrity, Visibility, Simplicity and Speed certainly was a driver. Protecting business value is another driver. In today's business environment of just in time inventory systems and integrated supply chains a few days disruption of service caused by natural disasters or other unforeseen occurrences can be

catastrophic to our customer's business cycle.

With 4 of our major ports of call on the east coast or Caribbean, hurricanes are a major threat and concern for our business operations. To that end, we have made significant investments to minimize or eliminate the negative effects our customers may experience during a service outage regardless of the origination.

Laz: Information technology is one of the major tools that support Sea Star Line's business. The BC/DR program is really about understanding how the business works, how technology supports the business, and how to protect the company's vital interests. Was there anything that IT learned about the business that provides an opportunity for IT to better support the business?

Perry: It sounds cliché, but IT must be aligned with the business. As companies continue to become more and more dependent upon technology, there becomes a time when it is impractical to fallback on manual processes. To that end, we learned that you must develop a continued open dialogue with the various business operating units to understand their current challenges and their 3-5 year vision. It further allows us to understand what applications and data are the most critical to the business and by doing this, allow us to properly plan and deploy an appropriate BC/DR plan.

Laz: What are some deciding factors that senior/executive managers consider when reviewing requests for enhanced BC/DR capabilities and what information do they expect from you to help them make their decisions?

Perry: As with any major expenditure, we evaluate every opportunity in the view of ROI. For BC/DR, the ROI is examined on the basis of cost avoidance, the risk of business interruption, the impact to our customer supply chain and the impact to our employees.

With the ever changing business environment coupled with the escalating threats from nature and terrorism, you must continually look to improve and modify your BC/DR program.

Laz: What advice would you give to a BC/DR professional who is seeking executive level support for a BC/DR enhancement?

Perry: You must understand the business drivers, the risks and the critical decisions the company is facing as well as the customer's expectation of service. In most cases, IT is at a disadvantage in that because IT is not the main focus on the business. Capital dollars are scarce with everyone competing for the same dollar. It is easier for the executive level to support and fund business operations than it is to spend that same money on redundant hardware and connectivity. To do this effectively, you must be viewed upon as a business partner and you have to have a proven track record of credibility with the business. Additionally, it is important to show how BC/DR initiatives support the vision and mission of the business.

Peter Laz, CBCP, is a business continuity consultant with Forsythe Solutions Group and has 19 years experience designing & implementing disaster recovery, business continuity and incident management programs. He is a member of the DRJ Editorial Advisory Board, Board of Director of PPBI and Program Director of the New York-Capital Region Chapter ACP. He can be reached at plaz@forsythe.com sector entity."

