

Collaborating across varied sectors, Business Continuity and Resilience professionals have developed an app to promote best practice on a wide range of challenges

A DIGITAL SOLUTION FOR A DIGITAL AGE

BY COLIN COTTELL

A new app developed by members of the UK's Retail Business Continuity Association (RBCA) demonstrates the value of industry professionals collaborating for the greater good of their organizations and the public, while working alongside the BCI in partnership, according to the member who put forward the concept.

Designed as a digital one-stop-shop to support industry professionals, the RBCA Resilience Best Practice App, which went live earlier this year, was developed during the latter half of 2019 by members of the RBCA from three leading retailers; Marks & Spencer (M&S), ASOS, and John Lewis & Partners, working alongside a BCI representative, Catherine Thomas.

Among the app's many features are a reference point for industry best practice and up-to-date information, a contact list, and instant messaging (See box for a full list of features).

According to John Frost, MBCI, RBCA Chair and Head of Business Continuity Retail Services at M & S, who proposed the original concept, the app is "a digital solution to a digital age" that reflects how information is accessed and obtained today.

However, according to Frost, with the team

putting together the content coming from four different organizations, supported by a further 21 organizations, and 50-plus members who will be adding and contributing to content going forward, the app demonstrates the vital importance of collaboration within the industry. "The value of collaboration on this scale is not something I have witnessed before," he says. "The app promotes the Resilience message on a number of fronts. It is an innovative digital way of collaborating, encouraging Resilience practitioners from across an entire sector to share their subject matter expertise within a safe and secure environment with their peers regardless of working for different organizations, and allows everyone to contribute to the content regardless of experience."

From its beginnings at an RBCA meeting in 2019 at which Frost floated the idea, Katherine Bosworth, CBCI, Business Continuity Manager at M&S and member of the app working party, says there was a recognition it would only work for the RBCA's members if there was a collaborative approach. "If we ended up developing the app in silos, it wouldn't be an industry app, it would just be a company app. So

FEATURES OF THE RBCA APP

- An instantly accessible list and a reference point for industry best practice broken down into user-friendly, bite-sized pieces. One example is the UK government's 175-page long Crowded Places Guidance, which has been split up into 11 more manageable sections. "People don't have to sift through maybe 200 pages to find one bit of information," says Elizabeth Britton-Jones.
- An up-to-date contact and immediately accessible list of BC professionals working with RBCA members.
- Instant messaging amongst RBCA members, facilitating co-operation and coordination when there is an incident.
- Other guidance built into the app includes invacuation, lockdown procedures and how to deal with suspect packages - all broken down into manageable snippets.
- It is designed to work in a variety of formats, including video and text, as well as having the functionality to support PDFs.
- Secure and confidential.
- Can be updated in real-time, and also works offline.

working collaboratively means that we are able to make it almost universal, that if any UK retailer joins the RBCA they will find it beneficial" she says.

Alice Lundgren, Business Assurance Manager at ASOS describes the group's modus operandi: "We all got together with a blank canvas, and we came up with the headings that would be important to everyone. Obviously, all retailers have their own individual ways of doing things and their own terminology, so it was just trying to find content that was going to be helpful for everybody," she says.

This approach has carried on throughout, says Bosworth, with members of the group reluctant to take credit for individual contributions. "I'd say we all have an equal, collaborative approach," she says.

Coming from different organizations meant the group benefitted from "different viewpoints and ideas", adds Lauren Ouzman, AMBCI, Resilience Manager at John Lewis.

Elizabeth Britton-Jones, CBCI, Business Continuity Manager at M&S, says, "I'm drawn from Marks and Spencer so having both Alice and Lauren come into the fold and suggest different ideas allowed us to think a bit differently."

Presenting the app to the wider RBCA group at one of the quarterly meetings was also useful, adds Britton-Jones, with one suggestion being to include slides from presentations given by speakers on the app. "I think the scope of it has grown purely from this engagement that we have both among ourselves as a group and then with the RBCA."

A key benefit of collaboration is that ideas and suggestions go through a process of evaluation and tweaking by others in the group, adds Lundgren.

Looking ahead, collaboration will continue to be at the heart of the app's further development, and it is envisaged that there will be greater scope to allow all of the RBCA's 50-plus member organizations to contribute content. For example, Britton-Jones suggests that in the Incident Guidance section of the app, specific content for the aviation sector - easyJet is a member of the RBCA - could be added.

"The world is our oyster, and we can keep developing it," says Britton-Jones.

However, Frost says the benefits of the app go well beyond functionality. "It is energising our more experienced members whilst at the same time inspiring those new to the industry. The concept of 'winning together' is very powerful as together we are stronger and can keep moving the industry forward in partnership with the BCI," says Frost. 📌

Additional information: The RBCA is a group of leading retailers. With more than 50 member businesses across 25 organizations, it meets quarterly to collaborate on all things Resilience. RBCA's motto is 'Plan, Prepare and Share'. The BCI is represented on the RBCA app working party by Research and Insight Manager Catherine Thomas.