

BEYOND BIN LADEN THINKING – THE SECURITY DIVIDEND
Corporate Emergency Response in the Aftermath of Business Bombings
By
Jim Truscott

Just as we have adjusted to the death toll, so has the business environment changed forever with the better companies now using their corporate Emergency Response capability to take them beyond danger to opportunity. The even better companies have moved from response to anticipation by not falling into the trap of thinking of bin Ladin just as a terrorist. The best companies recognize that Al-Qaeda is essentially an adversarial franchise in an avowed economic war to the death with the Christian capitalist west.

Al-Qaeda is run like a firm and bin Ladin is a hands-on Chief Executive with a huge appetite for risk and a meticulous approach to business strategy. Scenarios that are indicative of what the OBL franchise maybe planning include small planes flying into bigger planes, foot and mouth disease and viruses on control systems. Some are obvious. Some may require you to think outside the box, more like a screenwriter or novelist.

So just how vulnerable is your company? Gates and guards, guns and dogs are not impediments to the OBL franchise, so if you want to protect yourself you are going to have to look through the eyes of the adversary, by emulating their approach through legal and ethical threat penetration testing.

There is a limit to what can be done against the most extreme forms of attack and the only time that a terrorist attack can be prevented is in the planning stages. If you wish to interdict a terrorist operation before the attack occurs, you must train all of your employees to be vigilant and to collect intelligence. In short, you must humanize security.

While most companies and organizations will never face a terrorist attack, humanizing security is the only sustainable advantage in multi-competitor times. It is the only way of achieving a security dividend and generating return on investment. Business continuity is not enough to achieve resilience and within a few years, it will probably fade like all management fads as being unsustainable. The reality is that business cannot afford to harden everything and industry cannot rely on mutual aid, so companies must conduct threat penetration testing themselves.

Furthermore, mass casualty plans are now standard as terrorism puts every public gathering place at risk. Responding appropriately in the first 15 minutes is when you will have most impact in saving life. All companies have Employee Assistance Providers on call, and the best have well developed systems for providing peer support or fast buddies to use the expression adopted by Singapore airlines.

It is now normal to store the list of nominated emergency contacts for all employees in fire proof safes and to have duplicate copies off site. The best companies continually account for all people on site and are able to do immediate name calls and head counts if evacuating facilities. Invacuations, staying on site with the air conditioning switched off, is equally important as traditional evacuations when dirty bombs are involved. In high-rise buildings elevators maybe the fastest way out regardless of warnings.

Virtual Crisis Team meetings are now the norm, as indeed are fully equipped alternate locations and satellite phones. The best companies still resort to old fashioned switchboards in time of crisis using internal Call Centres and hotlines to contact employees.

Loudhailers are as important as ever in addition to rendezvous points in the absence of sirens to alert people directly to serious incidents. A common point of contact in the event of an emergency is essential, as is a community system for lost communications, lost communications procedures for travellers, GPS tracking, and security clearances for executives to open channels of communication with government.

Managing a security crisis involves going head to head with the OBL franchise Crisis Team. Emergency Managers must continue to look at patching the hole in the fence, and their plans and actions must be focused on getting back to the past. Crisis Leaders must see the open paddocks beyond the fence, and their strategy will focus on getting back to the future and the opportunities that await them.