



Client:
**Omaha Steaks
International, Inc.**

Solution:
Work Group Recovery

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Preparation Pays Off for Omaha Steaks

Situation:

Serving millions of active customers, Omaha Steaks and affiliated companies, is the nation’s largest direct response marketer of steaks and other frozen gourmet foods. Its products are available online, by mail order and catalog, at retail stores and through partnerships, alliances and resellers. As such, the call center is a vital lifeline for sales and customer service. When a long distance carrier’s equipment problem interrupted the flow of incoming calls to the call center, the company’s chief information officer did what every major business hopes to avoid. He made a disaster declaration and put Omaha Steaks’ workforce recovery plan into action.

“The ability for our customers to contact us is vital to customer service and sales. Any downtime is detrimental to our success, especially when it occurs at the start of the holiday season,” said Jeffrey L. Carter, vice president and chief information officer for Omaha Steaks. “With no definite fix time by the carrier, we had to make a decision and put our workforce recovery plan into action.”

That meant switching call center operations to the CoSentry Omaha Data Center and Work Group Recovery Facility.

Solution:

Once the disaster declaration was made, Omaha Steaks and CoSentry personnel went into action to allow normal call center operations to resume as quickly as possible from the CoSentry Omaha Data Center and Work Group Recovery Facility. Work group recovery seats were activated to accommodate anticipated call volumes.

A phone call connected Gray D. Wiebe, network computing manager at Omaha Steaks, to key personnel at the CoSentry operations center. Appropriate authorizations were verified and previously defined protocols were followed according to the workforce recovery plan. Connectivity between backup systems housed at the CoSentry Omaha Data Center and the Work Group Recovery Facility was established in minutes. A dedicated CoSentry engineer was assigned to expedite the transition process and the Omaha Steaks desktop images were pushed to all workstations. Telephone headsets and other supplies that had been staged as part of Omaha Steaks’ work group recovery plan were placed in preparation for the arrival of call center employees.



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"CoSentry realized the severity of the situation and immediately disengaged from other work to assist me with getting our call center workstations imaged down," Wiebe said.

As employees began to arrive, the facility was ready. "Everything was done to make the transition smooth for us and our employees, including assistance with security badges for arriving employees, a tour of the facility, identifying the location of restrooms and vending machines, a lunch table, coolers of ice and even a designated refrigerator for staff and cleanup services," said Cheryl Holtzen, Omaha Steaks director of inbound sales and consumer services. In addition, a conference room was commandeered to serve as offsite command post, complete with access to fax and copy machines.

The onsite presence of CoSentry senior staff was a reminder of their commitment to ensuring Omaha Steaks' ability to deliver optimum service levels to customers. "CoSentry also had a staff resource available to answer any questions and a staff liaison was always visible," Wiebe said. "They left no doubt that this is their area of expertise and they are committed to making sure I got up and running, fast!"

After several hours, the long distance carrier had identified and resolved the issue, however call center operations remained at the Work Group Recovery Facility for the remainder of the day to ensure no other problems would surface. By mid-afternoon, calls were returned to Omaha Steaks' primary call center. Headsets and other staging items were returned to the designated storage space at CoSentry. The connection between the work group recovery area and the data center cage was closed. Images on the Work Group Recovery Facility computers remain stored at CoSentry in anticipation of a planned disaster recovery test the following month.

Results:

"The whole experience was extremely positive and left us feeling like the investment we'd made in CoSentry has really proved itself worthwhile," Wiebe said.

The workforce recovery solution is part of Omaha Steaks' overall disaster recovery and business continuity plan.

"So often people view disaster recovery as a document, judging its effectiveness by the number of pages," Carter said. "We have always focused on a business continuity plan that was real, that could be put into motion regardless of the set of circumstances."

Twice each year, the company puts its plan to the test. The first is typically an abbreviated test and the second a complete disaster and recovery simulation. This year, the simulation will include failure of the phone switch.

"You can put a computer anywhere, but we can't operate without a phone switch," said Jeffrey Carter. "Originally, we wanted to build our own disaster recovery site, but the greatest concern was the availability of telecommunications capabilities. However, the cost of having a phone switch, circuits and lines just sitting around, along with the need for workspace to house people, was not worth the investment. The solution offered by CoSentry makes more sense."

In fact, Omaha Steaks utilizes CoSentry as part of a comprehensive data solution, which includes full data center replication and backup, as well as full Web site replication. This allows them to more easily perform planned maintenance, planned outages and routine testing without interruption to routine operation and without the limitations of the typical maintenance windows.

"The unfortunate reality is that the incidence of disaster declaration being made is more common than most people realize," said Kevin Dohrmann, CoSentry vice president and chief technology officer. "Power, telecom, infrastructure and more can trigger failure, proving again and again the need to mitigate against these scenarios with a well-thought out, proven plan that ensures business continuity and adapts to emerging threats, as Omaha Steaks continues to do."

As a result of the disaster declaration, Omaha Steaks identified opportunities for improvement, which will pay off in greater efficiency in call traffic flow. Even more fundamentally, Omaha Steaks sees its commitment to business continuity as one of its core responsibilities.

"Clients have many reasons for implementing disaster recovery plans—because they're publically traded or as part of their audit responsibilities," said Rod Peterson, CoSentry solutions consultant. "Omaha Steaks does it because it's good business and the right thing to do for their customers."