

Jones Walker: Weathering the Storm

The Situation

On August 29, 2005, New Orleans' worst fear was realized, but to Jones Walker, one of the South's largest and most diverse firms, the threat of a hurricane was nothing new.

Founded in 1937, Jones Walker has more than 210 attorneys, and has a presence along the Gulf and East Coasts, including offices in Baton Rouge, Houston, Lafayette, Miami, New Orleans and Washington, D.C. At least once a year, one or more of the firm's offices faced a storm warning. Each previous threat left the firm relatively unscathed. "We knew we had dodged the bullet several times in the prior hurricane seasons," said Jones Walker Chief Information Officer Ken Orgeron. "With the 2005 hurricane season, New Orleans came face-to-face with its worst nightmare—Hurricane Katrina."

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the firm's New Orleans office was left inoperable by the flood and wind damage and widespread power outages. The City of New Orleans was closed. Jones Walker was prepared for just such an event. With pre-planning and a quick call to action after the storm, CIO Ken Orgeron reclaimed critical information while setting up a back-up IT site in Baton Rouge. Within days, the firm was successfully up and running. Weeks later, when hurricane Rita threatened to wipe out their Baton Rouge office as well, Jones Walker turned to LexisNexis® Managed Network Services. In three days, Jones Walker had all their critical data from Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Houston replicating to the LexisNexis Data Center in Dayton, Ohio.



Ken Orgeron, CIO

Preparing for Business Continuity

"We had been reviewing business continuity since 9/11 and weighing out different alternatives, balancing it with the risk to the firm's business needs and client needs. We used the 9/11 Commission report as our guide to building a framework for a business continuity plan," Orgeron said.

"We began saving old PCs with the mindset of using a remote access approach, but that was problematic if we ran into bandwidth issues. A cold site was also considered, but our clients expect a level of excellence where the recovery time would meet their needs across the country."

Weathering the Storm

Initially, Jones Walker thought Katrina was headed for the firm's Miami office. When it became apparent Katrina was headed for Louisiana instead, the firm immediately moved its high availability critical servers from the New Orleans office to the Baton Rouge office.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall just southeast of Jones Walker's New Orleans office. On the morning of August 29, the levees east and north of the city failed and the city faced catastrophic flooding. "We knew the New Orleans location would be out of commission for some time," Orgeron said.

"From a hotel room in Jackson, Mississippi, I tried to run my widely dispersed IT department. I contacted LexisNexis Practice Management Solutions Specialist Brad Brown. With Brad's assistance, we set up a password-protected blog at Typepad. We posted critical information, such as locations of staff, alternate e-mail addresses, BlackBerry® PINs and cell phone numbers on this blog."

While not flooded, the New Orleans office was without power or water and was practically inaccessible due to military and police restrictions. Within days, Hurricane Rita was on the horizon with the potential to make landfall in Baton Rouge where all the high availability servers and data were now relocated. If Rita hit Baton Rouge, Jones Walker's data could be lost—there was no place to go and not enough time to find another close location.

On September 19, Orgeron turned to LexisNexis® again for assistance. LexisNexis quickly made arrangements for Jones Walker to send IT staff and servers from Baton Rouge to Ohio. In three days, Jones Walker had all its critical data from Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Houston replicating to the LexisNexis Data Center in Dayton, Ohio.

The Solution

Jones Walker has relied on LexisNexis for the past five years as an advisor for knowledge management, portal development, and business practice improvement. “We always felt the team at LexisNexis was a true partner in growing our practice,” Orgeron said.

Facing the threat of another disastrous hurricane, Jones Walker knew they could turn to LexisNexis Managed Network Services. “We wanted to turn to a trusted source, a ‘brain trust’ with vast experience. We knew they would provide our firm the spectrum of solutions, from ‘where money is no object’ to graduated solutions down the scale. We knew LexisNexis was involved with AMLAW firms DR/BCP as far as best practices for business continuation.”

“Beyond the excellent service we experienced on previous projects, we were amazed by the level of experience, expertise, and going the extra mile by the staff at the Data Center,” Orgeron said. “They truly went beyond our expectations in assisting with the set up for Hurricane Rita and with the complete build out of our hot site.”

“The service we received from LexisNexis was incredibly valuable. It provided peace of mind to our attorneys, as well as our clients. We found that there were many firms who simply thought good thoughts and suffered interruptions that Jones Walker would not find acceptable,” Orgeron said.

“The best way I can say it is, LexisNexis Managed Network Services Group treats our data with the same care as they do with their own data they serve up to the globe.”

Looking Forward

“Everyone in the New Orleans area is holding their breath as the hurricane season approaches,” Orgeron noted. “Many questions are being asked and considered. Will New Orleans take another hit? Will the levees hold? Will the city flood? How many times will we evacuate? How long we will be away from our homes and work? With all these questions, I know one thing for certain: Jones Walkers’ data is safe in Dayton, Ohio.”