Turning Customer Complaints...continued

Provide a written "Action Plan" to your customer within 1 week of the occurrence. This plan should detail exactly how you intend to resolve the problem. This response does not equate to an admission of guilt; rather, you are acknowledging that you have a process to arrive at a resolution based on facts. If your corrective action team determines that the fact-finding mission will take longer than 5 days, indicate this on your plan.

Internal actions. "Inspection" is an unpopular word for most of us in process-oriented companies. There is a place, however, for implementing inspection as part of an immediate containment process. It is imperative that you understand when to implement a more rigorous inspection plan.

Assemble a cross-functional team to solve the issue. Make sure that the team has both the authority and the responsibility to take needed corrective action. Ensure that the steps taken to resolve the issue are applied systemically to all areas

of the organization where a similar problem could occur. Post the team's results at your facility and be sure that the customer understands your commitment to communication.

Long-term relationships. Follow up on the Action Plan that you have submitted. Put a trigger within your calendar that identifies when you indicated that you would have an effective resolution. This follow-up will ensure that you are providing responsive customer service.

Additionally, this follow-up will be of service to your customer's quality system. Your call provides the mechanism for your customer to "ensure that the actions of the corrective actions are effective." Your relationship with the customer will grow and your word will be trusted.

The external issue also serves as an educational tool for your employees. Effective corrective actions will improve your process and provide the communication tool to make your employees more aware of problems. They will thereby be

more likely to "own" their jobs.

These corrective action notifications will spread the learning opportunity to every function within your organization, not only those functions directly responsible for resolution. The end result is a learning, continuously improving organization.

Conclusion. Will Rick Ankiel be remembered for his career as one of the most promising young pitchers in major league baseball? Or, will he be thought of as Nuke LaLoosh from the movie "Bull Durham," who frequently pelted the team mascot with fastballs no matter where the creature roamed?

Will complaints be a small footnote in your quest to continue to build your relationships with your customers? Or, will they remain a source of doubt and lack of confidence with your customers no matter how the issue was resolved? Turn complaints into credibility by adopting a quick, interactive policy for all customer issues.

Where Is Your Backup Data?

By Miles Free, Director, Technology Services   mfree@pmpa.org

I have a friend who owns a small business in southern Florida. He was lucky when Hurricane Wilma hit the state last year. His roof and windows held, therefore, he didn't lose any paper or computer records.

However, his neighbor was not so lucky. He lost both paper records and computers in the fifteenth hurricane to hit Florida in 15 months. The real surprise, though, was that the backup data the neighbor had counted on was lost as well. The backup tapes he was relying on were located across
(Continued on next page)

Where Is Your Backup Data? continued

town and were also damaged by the heavy rains.

Off-site means off-site. But when storms the size of the continent of Europe are threatening, one needs to think a bit differently about what exactly "remote storage" means. A-couple-of-states-away may seem remote in good weather, but when the 100-plus miles per hour winds and 6 inches per hour rain bands extend across several state lines and time zones, the idea of remote is easily confused with local.

Where is your backup data? How many redundant copies do you have? Where are they located?

When you started your business and your records were smaller, a backup disk or tape located at home or across town might have been adequate. As your business has grown, are the precautions that you have taken to protect and preserve business-critical information kept up? Is a solution that was acceptable for a pre-9/11

world or a pre-Hurricane Katrina and Wilma world still adequate today?

When disasters hit such large areas, a non-local solution could be the only way to ensure both the security and availability of your data. National services might be more attractive, specifically because they are so remote geographically.

Perhaps the idea of backup (as in backup disks or backup tapes) needs to be reconsidered. When infrastructure such as highways and airports are shut down, what good is your physical tape or disk sitting intact in a vault hundreds or thousands of miles away? Maybe it is time for you and your IT team to look once again at crisis planning and the suitability of having an online continuous backup service.

Fees range from $100 to a few hundred dollars per month and allow continuous backup and easy restoration/re-creation of lost or damaged files. Maybe you will be lucky

enough to never suffer through a hurricane, flood or tornado, but perhaps you are only a couple of weeks away from a server or a hard-disk crash.

There are many ways that today's complex information technologies can fail. Some of the services for remote, online backup that I have seen include Evault, LiveVault, Intronis Technologies and Remote-Backup.com. Before you sign up for these services, your IT people should verify the security offered.

The precision machined products industry is fortunate. The havoc wreaked by the hurricanes of 2005, for the most part, has missed our homes and shops. However, the real world of disk failures, sabotage, accidents and other disasters could become our turn in the months or years ahead. Where is your backup data?

Critical Skills For Effectiveness In Today's New World — Part 4 Of 4

By Miles Free, Director, Technology Services   mfree@pmpa.org

There are four trends that define the differences between yesterday's way of maximizing effectiveness and today's: 1) Solo to team performance; 2) Stand-alone company to link in supply chain; 3) From problem detection to process failure prevention; and 4) From managing data to empowering decision making. This month's article looks at the fourth of these trends.

From Managing Data To Empowering Decision Making

Many of us pride ourselves on our use of data to drive our decision