

# Forward-looker ensures business is to be continued

By ADINA GENN

After 9/11, many looked at life differently. That included Gail Trugman-Nikol, who recognized not only a great loss of life but a great loss of knowledge.

"I realized companies need help in protecting documentation," she said. "So many companies lost everything. There was a lot of knowledge lost in those 3,000 people killed."

Trugman-Nikol spent the next several years as a computer consultant, all the while devising means to preserve what she called a company's "tribal knowledge." By September 2005, she was ready to launch Hicksville-based Unique Business Solutions, which she runs from a home office.

The firm provides operations manuals that spell out a company's processes and systems, and provides staff training and cross-training of critical processes to help a business avoid interruptions following a catastrophic event.

Trugman-Nikol also simplifies processes to improve efficiencies and save money, and helps clients hire and train new workers to the ways of the company.

Trugman-Nikol invested about \$15,000 and "a lot of time and effort" to launch the company. She currently has no employees, but subcontracts to a trusted resource, who Trugman-Nikol once employed at her former company, GLTN Computer Consultants, a computer training and consulting company she sold in the late 1990s.

She launched UBS at a time when baby boomers, at the cusp of retirement age, could well leave the workforce in a mass exodus and take all their skills



Bob Gighione

**LIFELINE: Gail Trugman-Nikol aims to keep businesses running during and after a crisis.**

with them. It's vital, Trugman-Nikol believes, to identify their knowledge and "start the documentation."

Even companies with relatively young employees are at risk. "I ask the deadly question: 'What would you do if you lost your office manager tomorrow?'" Trugman-Nikol said. "They look at me and say they don't want to think about it."

But some do consider the scenario: In the last year, Trugman-Nikol has worked on 12 separate projects. Much of her work is conducted at the client's site, where Trugman-Nikol tells workers, "Teach me

to do your job so I can put it in the manual."

She also hands out spiral notebooks and tells workers to write down everything they do, and the specific approaches they take to their tasks. Her goal is to uncover details, including the whereabouts of certificates of insurance and even helpful Web addresses.

The key, she said, is to get staff involved in order to get their full cooperation. She encourages owners to offer \$50 to \$100 bonuses as incentives.

The finished result, Trugman-Nikol added, boosts the value of a company and its staff, which may appeal to owners selling their business.

An operations manual alone won't increase a company's selling price, said Ken Stein, president of The Kensington Company, whose specialties included business valuations. Still, "buyers like seeing a real structure in place," he said, adding that companies with manuals are usually better run.

To build buzz, Trugman-Nikol developed a Web site, [www.UBSassociates.com](http://www.UBSassociates.com), on which she's posted client testimonials. She joined networking groups and speaks about business continuity to local business associations.

Trugman-Nikol hopes to receive referrals from consulting firms with complementary services and from accountants. As the company grows and she brings on new sub-contractors – or eventually hires staff – Trugman-Nikol plans to stay involved with projects "to make sure the client is happy."

And she will only bring on qualified people, she added. People skills and management skills are a must, as are good writing skills. New hires "have to be communicators," she said.

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**Gail L Trugman-Nikol**  
**Unique Business Solutions**  
**516-935-5641**  
**Gail@UBSAssociates.com**