BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

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In addition to making sure your business is running smoothly each day, you need to have a well-thought-out and easily executed business continuity plan, or BCP. Disaster is bound to happen, so put a plan in place that will keep your business fully operational in the face of adversity.

WHY DO YOU NEED A BCP?

A BCP provides for the processes by which your business will continue to function (i.e., generate revenue) in the face of fire, theft, destruction, plague, etc. There are many other benefits as well, including:

- Reduced Downtime – Power outages, Internet outages, natural and man-made disasters can all have a profound impact on your business. Without a BCP in place, the amount of time spent organizing teams, moving resources around and otherwise scrambling will cost your company overhead and potential revenue. If you have a plan in place, you already possess the instructions for how to operate your company in the face of disaster and can be operational in less time. Less time wasted scrambling means more savings for your company.

- Incorporate remote locations – Branch offices, conference centers, hotels and employee homes are just some of the places you can incorporate into your BCP. You can continue work from remote locations in the event that your primary place of business is affected by disaster.

- Your service delivery – If you're not able to take care of your customers, they may go somewhere else. A well-designed BCP will give you the tools you need to keep your business up and fully operational. Not only will you retain your existing customers because you can continue to deliver their products or services, you may also stand a chance of gaining new customers if your competition doesn't have a BCP. Consider two companies across the street from one another. If a major utility outage takes out power to both businesses, but business A is the only one with a plan for installing and activating an emergency generator, where will all the customers for company B end up?

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Each business has its own unique requirements for business continuity planning, but here are some common things to consider when compiling a BCP:

- Management of the plan – A well-designed BCP should incorporate all areas and aspects of your business operation. In planning your BCP, it is best to assemble a team to design and manage the plan. This should be a collaborative effort and should not fall to one specific person.

- Consider the business impact – Since all areas of your business are likely to be impacted by the disaster in some way, you need to know what areas are most important to your operation and be able to prioritize them. This will help you minimize your losses and be as efficient as possible during the recovery process.

- A BCP is NOT the same as data backup – As a managed services provider, we often have to explain the difference between a BCP and a data backup and recovery plan. A backup plan provides a component of your BCP — it ensures your data is protected and safe. However, the BCP includes all the processes and steps necessary to keep your business running.

- Different disasters impact the business in different ways – Your BCP should include the processes and individual responsibilities for handling different kinds of disasters. How and what you do if the building burns down can be quite different for how and what you do if area flooding occurs. A good BCP will include different processes for different disasters.

CREATE YOUR PLAN

Start with the prioritization of your products, services and business functions. From there, you can start to create a plan for how and what to do in the event of a disaster. Your plan should be clear in the responsibilities of your team members and employees and contain all the processes to be followed. There are template BCP plans on the Internet that can provide a good starting point.

REVIEW YOUR PLAN

After creating your plan, go over it very carefully and take the time to run a drill to test the plan. This will be your roadmap in the face of disaster. Since no business is static, neither should your BCP. Review the plan periodically — at least once or twice a year — to ensure it still fits with your business operations and needs. You never know when disaster can strike, so it's important to the security of your business to put a BCP in place. The sooner you implement one, the better off you and your business will be.

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