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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

The Ultimate Guide to Business Continuity Planning (BCP)

Don't wait until it's too late! Protect your business against potential threats with this essential guide to Business Continuity Planning now

This is your calm-before-the-storm guide to keep calm and carry on when an unforseen event sets in and threatens to wreak havoc on your productivity and profits.

Have you ever wondered how other businesses just seem to get on with it when something disastrous happens? Ever been curious how everything just keeps running smoothly and there's no sign of behind the scenes chaos? Chances are they'll have a strong Business Continuity Plan in place. But there's no reason you can't too…

Read on and when others batten down the business hatches, you'll be safe in the knowledge you've done everything possible to keep your head above water while ensuring your workforce and your infrastructure aren't drowning.

At a glimpse, here's what you can expect to find in this convenient go-to guide:

- BCP in a nutshell - what exactly is it? why do you need it and what's the best way to go about getting one?

- Why questioning yourself could give you answers you never knew you needed - but now wonder how you existed without

- Imitation or creation - we talk through the best examples of BCP to follow and how to tailor them to suit your own needs

- What the real risks are and how to prioritise them without losing perspective

- Why you should trust in a Disaster Recovery Plan

- How to simplify your BCP to make your life easier - who wouldn't want that?

Sure, it sounds ideal when you've got time on your hands but most of us are so concerned with the here and now - living in the present - and dealing with our business responsibilities on a daily basis that we simply haven't the time to sit and think about things that might not even happen at all

That's where this white paper comes in handy… because it removes all the clicking around, browsing through, swotting up - it outlines the benefits of a BCP in handy bite sized chunks that you can absorb and digest at your own free will.

What is a Business Continuity Plan?

OK, it might sound like something an insurance salesman would try and sell you but in reality, people using BCPs are actually pretty switched on and forward-thinking individuals. They are simply the people who ask themselves 'what if?' on a frequent basis.

They are the people who have thought ahead and envisage potential scenarios which might cause some stress and strife.

So let's get into it. What is a BCP? A BCP might be described by some in business as 'just common sense' - surely everyone at management level should be thinking along these lines to avoid a downward spiral in a time of disaster?

Well, not necessarily. A Business Continuity Plan is all about growing and enhancing the resilience in your business and having a greater realisation and understanding of how to recover should something untoward take place. It's not simply about thinking about all the bad things that could happen, but more how a business can bounce back and continue along a steady path without letting those things trip anyone up. Think of it as a framework for security to lean on in times of crisis and provide reassurance and stability both through your own eyes and through the eyes of the workforce.

Business Continuity Planning is all about:

- Identifying potential threats to an organisation

- Realising what potential damage could occur and how this would affect the business

- Looking at the business overall and designing an inclusive framework to build resilience through each department to avoid unexpected incidents becoming detrimental to productivity and profits

- Ensuring everyone connected to the organisation - employees, stakeholders, investors and customers is protected plus the brand's reputation is assured

And although the term 'disaster recovery' has been around since the '60s, 'business continuity' might sound relatively new. But rest assured, if you're reading this thinking 'am I the only one in the dark about all this?', you are not alone.

In fact, in 2013, 74% organisations admitted to not backing up all of their virtual servers even though 25% of PCs were estimated to fail that year while a staggering 95% experienced a data outage in the past year. Now, do you really think those organisations were thinking about future-proofing? No. Neither did we.

What should you be considering?

Let's learn from those mistakes and consider firstly what we should be asking ourselves when creating a Business Continuity Plan from scratch.

Your plan should ideally cover a wide range of possible actions so try to follow the tried and tested four main stages of business continuity plans set out below while asking yourself the following questions:

Stage one:

- **Ask yourself** - Is the emphasis of my plan on the response to the incident and not the cause of the incident?

- **Ask yourself** - Is this plan adaptable? will it be as effective on Bank Holidays, weekends or in poor weather conditions?

- **Ask yourself** - Is this written clearly - can it be translated if needed and easily understood?

- **Ask yourself** - Does everyone involved clearly understand their role?

- **Ask yourself** - Are we regularly testing this against specific circumstances?

Stage two:

- **Have I...** made specific emergency management arrangements that can be written into the organisation's structure?

- **Have I...** made sufficient emergency plans and involved those who will be crucial contacts at this stage?

Stage three:

- **Ask yourself -** Have I created a complete picture and effectively integrated all the activities of the different sections within my organisation in order to achieve an efficient and timely response to an incident?

Stage four:

- **Am I prepared...** should I need to make arrangements with other authorities who might become involved such as the police and fire brigade?

- **Am I prepared...** have I co-ordinated plans with other building users if in a shared office set-up?

Who should you be talking to?

Less 'we're all in this mess together', more 'let's pull together to ensure this is a success'. No one wants to feel like they're excluded in business - especially during times of doubt so it's important you are keeping all lines of communication open with everyone - employees, stakeholders, suppliers and customers.

It's also important to consider the doubts that might be raised with different groups of people connected to your organisation should business operations be disrupted:

Who are they? Customers
What are they thinking? Will there be a shortage of products/services? Will the price rise? I've already placed an order - should I be worried that it will never turn up? How quickly will they recover from this? Will I get a discount or free goods? Should I go elsewhere now?

Who are they? Employees
What are they thinking? How will this affect my job? Is my job now as secure as it was before? Will i need to relocate to a new office? Am I going to be kept up-to-date or left in limbo? Do I feel safe in this role now? Should I start looking for another job?

Who are they? Suppliers
What are they thinking? When should we resume deliveries and where should we deliver to now?
Payment? Will they still have the ability to pay us?

Who are they? The media
What are they thinking? What happened? Who is responsible? Is anyone injured? How much is this going to cost the company? What will the company do to prevent such accidents in the future? Who can we contact for more information?

Remember, you need to talk and listen to all of these people (speak to your PR advisor who will advise you re: communicating with the press) prior to anything happening to reassure them that you have a Business Continuity Plan in place.

Another wise idea is to pre-record messages via different mediums so that a message of authority and hope can reach a large number of people in a short time. This will also decrease the possibility of false rumours. If you're telling one audience one thing and another a separate story, it will raise issues of credibility so ensure everyone is on the same page.

Ensure there is a **crisis communications team** in place and appoint these people wisely depending on their length of service with the company and general reliability and integrity of character.

What are your risks?

It is more than just coping, managing and pulling through. No one wants to have to implement their recovery strategy and even with the most precise and thorough planning unexpected events can still happen.

Risk management is all about realising and prioritising - before you're stood ankle-deep in cinders having seen a fireball tear through the business you spent 10 years building up or scratching your head in front of a warehouse of weather-damaged stock that you won't be able to shift.

Remember, certain risks will always be specific to an industry and the nature of the business. If you're selling goldfish and suddenly there is a widespread outbreak of fin-rot that exclusively kills goldfish, that is going to be a pretty specialised risk that only affects a certain number of people (and goldfish) but there are always generalised risks that all businesses can factor into their BCP:

● Damage to property as a result of fire, flood and natural disasters such as earthquakes

● Diseases that might spread and stop all or the majority of the workforce from working

● Terrorist threats

● IT and network problems - loss of infrastructure

● Supplier failures

● Strikes

● Transport stoppage

● Syndicate lottery wins

Once you have identified a number of risks associated with your organisation, it is important to note the response triggers - how the events will affect the business and whether that will then cause a domino effect of destruction.

Once the response triggers have been identified, it is vital to realise what needs to be done to ensure recovery. Here are a few examples:

Incident: Fire or flood
Response trigger: Premises damaged
Recovery strategy: Fallback to recovery site with mirrored work set-up and secure space

Incident: Bomb threat
Response trigger: Denial of access to premises
Recovery strategy: Work from home or fallback to recovery site

Incident: Supplier failure
Response trigger: Unable to fulfil orders
Recovery strategy: Use pre-designed mailshots to inform customers of the delay and switch to another trusted supplier that has already been assigned/briefed

Every organisation is different and will need to determine the set of threats which it believes are pertinent to the business. This list needs to be regularly reviewed in order to assess the possible likelihood of events and should also be compared with contextual threats.

How to predict the cost of a setback

Should a risk factor move from just a potential threat to an actual event, it could be hugely detrimental to the business and its future. Predicting the true cost that a disruption or loss of business data would bring should be of paramount importance. Having a clear idea of the actual amount will help determine whether a business continuity plan is worth the investment. It also also gives an indication as to the depth of the detail you will require in order to deal with the scale of the operations, taking into consideration the size and scale of the business.

This isn't just about numbers though. Anyone can work out the cost of the premises and loss of earnings over a given period, this is about the deeper underlying questions - the hidden costs. Again, it's about thinking 'what if' and questioning yourself:

How much do your clients cost you?
Evaluate how much your clients spend with you each year - from the most lucrative right down to the minimal amount - can you really afford to lose any of them?

How much could your data cost you?
If you lost all your data, how would you be able to continue the support of your valued clients without access to current systems, records, contracts and past communications?

How much will a loss of confidence cost you?
Evaluate the level of confidence of your customers - would that be damaged or lost should you not be able to contact them, or they you, for a few days? a few hours?

How much will word of mouth cost?
News spreads fast - but bad news spreads ever faster. Potential loss in reputation is the last thing any business needs especially after building up a consistent period of positive feedback.

Remember to evaluate the cost of losing all your accounts including present calculations and historical reports, year end, PAYE, purchase orders, invoices, quotes and remittance details and ideally create alternate methods from backed-up data so that you can invoice clients without your original records, pay suppliers and produce your trading figures with confidence.

Testing your Business Continuity Plan

Within your all-encompassing Business Continuity Plan, ensure you don't forget the all-important testing stage. This is the time when you can iron out any hiccups, flaws and potential areas of weakness that could lead to breakdowns in communication and productivity, hindering your chance of getting the organisation back up and running promptly and efficiently. Do it right and your customers and staff won't even bat an eyelid, let alone lie awake at night worrying about their order or future prospects.

When considering the longevity of your BCP, remember the tangibility of the plan itself - regardless of how much thought and detail it contains, if it gets destroyed in an event that it was supposed to safeguard against, it won't be of much use to anyone. The best strategy is to share your BCP with at least one other colleague at your workplace and make sure at least one copy is stored off-site.

Testing your Business Continuity Plan will not only verify its effectiveness but also provide the ideal opportunity to train participants in how to react and respond should a crisis occur. Testing can be bespoke to your individual plan yet many businesses follow a generally trusted method:

Stage one:
Ensure your BCP testing and training will be timely. Accommodate workloads by testing in less busy periods or at the weekend if possible. Remember to promote and communicate the importance of the testing to the entire workforce and make sure everyone understands that it is a staged scenario - the last thing you want is for people to lose their heads in a false drill. Then again, if they do, at least you know who might benefit from more training.

Stage two:
Aim to test your BCP at least quarterly. Ensure key members of your team are assigned and prepared for their responsibilities and don't exclude anyone. Discuss any areas that might need improving and be open to ideas people might have. Train new managers and familiarise them with the plan while accommodating new feedback

Stage three:
Run BCP workshops where you can conduct disaster role-playing sessions that enable participants to fully understand their duties given a specific emergency scenario. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each session and aim to schedule at least two sessions a year.

Stage four:
Take your role-playing to the next level and at least once a year perform a close-to-life simulation of a possible crisis scenario. Include business leaders, partners, suppliers, management and staff. Also, be sure to test data recovery, staff safety, asset management, relocation protocols and loss recovery procedures. Each year, change around the scenarios to keep alert.

Recovery Time Objective (RTO) what is it and what does it mean?

The Recovery Time Objective is the maximum allowable amount of time in which to get the business fully or partially operational after a disaster. The recovery strategy will determine the RTO of the disaster recovery solution. It is important for the business to understand exactly what length of time they can be without their systems before they will incur negative impact so that they can chose an RTO that is acceptable.

Recovery Point Objective (RPO) what is it and what does it mean?

A Recovery Point Objective is the exact point in time at which a business wishes to be able to recover following a disaster. The backup strategy will determine the RPO of the disaster recovery solution. Data is constantly being created or manipulated in your environment – the RPO is necessary to define and understand so that you can implement a solution that will recover you to a point in time that is acceptable to your business.

How to make life easier

Earlier on we were talking about off-site locations - both storing data there and working from a mirrored set-up should an unexpected disaster occur. But what about storing all your data elsewhere - somewhere you can access it at any time, without restrictions or even a key to unlock the alternative premises?

Countless organisations have written the Cloud into their Business Continuity Plans and trust in it to store their data. From a BCP point of view, that means it's now easier for service providers to offer on demand, off site, flexible and scalable solutions plus:

- Hosted services such as storage and backup meaning less hassle for all. Typically, off-site locations are extremely secure and outages are very unlikely. And like we mentioned before, an option to replicate data on a second server off-site is available which is imperative to the BCP

- No investment in software and hardware upfront and no peaks in spending since Cloud services are paid for on a pay-as-you-go basis which enables more efficient budgeting

- Utilise staff resources more efficiently due to anytime, anywhere access to data. Particularly helpful if an operational premises has suffered physical damage - the company can continue to operate without a drop in productivity

If you think Cloud-based Business Continuity Planning is something you might consider, the simplest way to migrate an existing BCP is to migrate across gradually rather than all at once. For example, you might start with failover and data replication first.

Remember also to choose your Cloud-based service wisely and don't just jump on the bandwagon of popular brands - it is ultimately the service behind the brand name that counts, rather than whether they've been crowned in any Cloud-commended top 10.