

Business Continuity Planning for Small Businesses: Why?

What is BCP¹ and why should I care?

If you run a business, any size business, you need to stop and ask: “What happens if disaster strikes?” There are any number of things that can go wrong: some are natural disasters, “acts of God”, and others, accidents or just plain old bad luck. If you run your business from your home and your office is in the basement what would happen if your house flooded because of rain or a broken water or sewer main? Would you be able to continue to do business? After the water clears and all the flotsam and jetsam are hastily cleared to your front yard, would you be able to restart your business without skipping a beat? What if you rent an office in a building with amenities such as telephone, receptionist, internet connection and a mail room, and a careless, unaware tenant: plugs ten devices into an extension cord made for four? When the fire starts and the fire sprinklers go off and the fire fighters hose everything down and the investigators once again allow you access to the space: will your files be usable? Will the rolodex be readable? Will the computers turn on? Will the printers print?

These are extreme examples. They are near to worst case situations. Not all BCP events are major happenings. Sometimes the event is as simple as a computer crashing or losing your phonebook with the names and numbers of all your vendors and customers. If you are properly prepared, these events will be nothing more than a minor inconvenience, an irritation promptly forgotten. On the other hand if you do not have a backup of your data or you have no other copy of your contacts this minor event can slow down and eventually destroy your business. Your successful, growing business can crash to a grinding halt and the recovery can be painful. In some cases your business will not recover at all. There are many statistics quoted about how many businesses fail after a disaster, most of them unsubstantiated². If you take a step back to look at the way your business runs, and take the time to understand its daily operation, you will have one of those businesses that beats the odds.

There is no “one size fits all” business continuity plan. Just like every business is unique, every continuity plan will be unique. While understanding that each business is different, it is important to realize that all businesses share some basic common elements: customers, vendors, bank accounts, account payable, taxes, etc. These are the foundations from which you will begin to understand business continuity planning and construct a plan for your business.

As you continue to read about BCP, you are likely to reach a point at which you say something to the effect of “This is a lot of work. I’ll get back to it later.” Your words probably won’t be as gentle or polite. Let me tell you, I get it: business continuity planning is not fun. It takes time. You often have to think about disastrous, unpleasant events. It is like writing a health care proxy for your business. You need to imagine all the terrible things that might happen, and plan your response. This is not fun but it is necessary. In the best case you will never need to

¹ Business Continuity Planning

² <http://www.continuitycentral.com/feature0440.htm>

put your plan into action and you will have gained a deeper understanding of what it takes to run your business. In the worst case something unexpected will happen and you will have a plan. You will know how to recover your business operations. Your customers will know what is happening and be patient with you. Your vendors will understand the situation and offer you assistance. And in the end you will be grateful that you had a plan.

At home you practice with your family what to do in case of fire and you have a first aid kit and, hopefully, a disaster action plan. At school the kids have fire drills and maybe you are old enough to remember the “duck and cover drills”³. Every local and state government and the Federal government have an agency dedicated to emergency management⁴. Why would you take the position that you are above the fray and that nothing bad will ever happen to your business? It is not a realistic position. Having faith that everything will be ok is not an emergency response plan.

Having a business continuity plan is an exercise in introspection, speculation and imagination. You must look inward at your business from the outside and really understand what it takes to operate every day. You must take that understanding and ask “What if....?” You must then use your imagination; you must find creative solutions that can get you through imagined crisis. Do not let your emergency response be “I’ll figure it out when it happens”. By then it will be too late. Call Pocono PC Pro to guide you through the process so that when the inevitable happens you are prepared. Start your BCP Plan today.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_and_cover

⁴ <http://www.fema.gov/>