The CEOs Guide to Business Continuity
Best Practices for Ensuring Your Success
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Imagine a group of your employees huddled around a conference table brainstorming the infinite number of ways that your business could be forced to close its doors, permanently. If that sounds crazy to you, then listen to this: that is how our nation's Armed Forces prepare for the worst. It is also the method used by the best-prepared firms, according to Dutch Leonard, a risk expert at Harvard Business School.

When it comes to protecting your livelihood—and the livelihood of your employees and stakeholders—where should you start? The good news is you do not have to rely solely on your own resources. Most businesses do not have business continuity experts on staff; so instead they rely on organizations that do have the expertise and are willing to help you.

The goal of this document is to help you begin your process of analyzing the intricacies of your organization that are putting you at risk. We also hope that it delivers actionable advice that could be the difference between your survival and your demise.

Employee Hardware Continuity

Employee downtime has a direct effect on your bottom line. Having backup systems and services available for disruptions allows employees to minimize the time lost waiting for new equipment to be set-up, restored, purchased or shipped.

At a minimum you should maintain an inventory of phones, computers and related
equipment, as well as a recent backup of employee data. For maximum flexibility move employee desktops, phones and other core hardware into hosted or cloud environments that can be accessed from a variety of devices, even from an employee's own device. This provides optimal flexibility and risk mitigation for the inevitable local hardware failures.

**Back Office Hardware Continuity**

For the past several years, large enterprise organizations have been working to move core IT systems and software off-site to more secure and available locations like datacenters. With the expansion of broadband and the advent and greater adoption of the cloud, these types of environments are now more affordable and accessible than ever before.

Moving mission critical equipment off-site frees internal resources to work on more strategic projects and lowers an organization’s total cost of ownership. By utilizing cloud technology, businesses are able to move faster, become more flexible and gain scale easier. For equipment that must remain on premises, having spare inventory and battery backup, or alternate sources of power, are best practices in case of failure.

**Employee Continuity**

Establishing a formal written on-boarding process is often overlooked by many organizations. This can lead to reduced employee productivity and can delay the learning curve for the new employee.

Best practice is to establish a documented process that includes employee set-up, defines role and responsibility and sets clear expectations. Equally as important is to have a documented process for when an employee leaves the company, including re-routing emails, phone calls, etc. and having a defined action plan for handling their responsibilities until a replacement is found. Finally, the process should include properly notifying any important customers or other key stakeholders.

**Customer Continuity**

Most organizations make a substantial amount of revenue from existing customers. Maintaining those relationships is important for maintaining your revenue. While the lines of communication between your employees and customers may be open, employee performance rapidly impacts customer satisfaction and revenue.
Establishing key metrics for customer satisfaction and employee performance are mandatory for revenue assurance. Surveying customers is an inexpensive way to measure customer service. Employee performance can be measured and coached from a variety of tools and applications. Many companies rely on recorded customer interactions to monitor and coach employees with a defined process.

**Utility Continuity**

Utilities including power, HVAC, internet, phone and other services are the lifeline for most companies. For different reasons, many organizations fail to properly prepare for the loss of these utilities, resulting in revenue loss, reduced employee productivity and customer dissatisfaction.

Protect your business for unplanned events by having backup power in place; having your data backed up so that it can be accessed remotely; and developing a plan for employees to work from home if necessary to maintain revenue, employee productivity and customer satisfaction.

**Real Estate Continuity**

Any disaster can cripple an organization. If your physical location is breached, in-accessible, or gone, you should have a plan to establish a temporary business presence and lay out a plan for re-establishing operations long-term.

Securing doors and other entry ways is critical for employee, and overall office, security. At a minimum offices should have magnetic locking doors that require employees and guests to announce their arrival or have individual access badges.

For many companies, employees can work from home on a short-term basis with the proper preparation and systems.

For multi-site organizations, having spare real estate capacity in each location can provide space during emergencies or for overflow.

For single location companies, your property management company or landlord may have space available in your time of need. You can also work to establishing a local "buddy" program where you could temporarily have employees work from the office of other organizations in the region. Chambers of commerce and other business networking functions provide good access to like-minded business managers and owners.
Revenue Continuity

When asked, most business owners and CEOs affirm that employees are the most important assets of an organization. Employee turnover causes ripples within your organization, thereby reducing employee productivity and potentially reducing satisfaction and revenue.

Formal processes for on-boarding and exiting will mitigate the issue and can reduce the impact, but other steps can be taken to ensure revenue. Have a process defined to connect with affected customers and prospects when an employee leaves. Take steps to mitigate losses by removing personal information, such as personal cell phones or email addresses, from customer conversations.

Do not allow employee cell phone numbers on business cards or for personal email addresses to be used. Establish lines of communication that can be controlled easily and managed exclusively by the organization. Also consider taking steps to mitigate losses by removing personal information and data about your employees from customer conversations.

Establish lines of communication that can be controlled easily and managed exclusively by the organization.

In Summary

Now that you understand where potential vulnerabilities exist within your organization it is up to you to take the next step. We are here to help by providing you with a continuity assessment. This is a free service that investigates and grades every vital aspect of your organization and will result in a document and dialog of recommendations on how to transform your business and ensure its long term success.

http://www.economist.com/news/business/21565975-hurricane-sandy-was-another-test-how-well-businesses-can-keep-going-when-disaster