4 Business Continuity Planning Steps to Reduce Downtime in an Emergency

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Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.

The very idea of unplanned downtime is enough to make any business leader's blood run cold and any IT leader's blood pressure rise. But if 2017 has taught enterprises anything, it's to expect the unexpected. Between massive fires in California, unprecedented flooding in Houston, and hurricane damage in several states, natural disasters have taken many businesses offline this year.

What business continuity planning steps can you take to keep operations moving forward, even in the face of disasters and other emergencies?

Make sure your team understands the business continuity planning steps in the event of an emergency.

1. Conduct a Business Continuity Impact Analysis

A business continuity plan outlines how your company will maintain or quickly resume business functions in the event of a disaster or other major disruption. It takes your technology, data, and people into account.

In case of emergency, the IT department's time and resources will be strained. Team members will need to know who and what to get back online first. A business continuity impact analysis (BIA) helps you set recovery priorities and strategies, identify the effects of disrupting certain functions and processes, and determine how much downtime is acceptable for each function before serious negative impacts occur.

A BIA answers questions regarding which functions are most critical to ensure your business stays operational, and which resources are necessary to keep each department working. For example, sales and customer service can't do much without customer relationship management (CRM) access, shipping and receiving are useless without inventory visibility, and no one can work without communications.

The Department of Homeland Security offers BIA worksheets and templates.

2. Move Your Communications to the Cloud

There is no such thing as business continuity without clear communication. Yet, time and time again, communication networks are first to collapse during serious emergencies. Not only does this make it hard to check on the safety of employees in affected areas, but the downtime also means lost revenue.

> *To keep your business running during or after a crisis, you need your technology — but you also need your team.*

On-premises communications solutions are often vulnerable to disasters because the PBX hardware controlling the phone system is physically located on-site at the business location. Cloud communications solutions support business continuity planning by providing remote and mobile access to the system, a quality network that won't be taken down by regional disasters, and features that keep your system operating through on-site emergencies such as lost power or internet.

The best way to ensure the lines of communication stay open — whether there's a serious emergency, a snowstorm that's dangerous for drivers, or just a regular old power outage — is to get your communications off-site and enjoy the benefits of cloud migration.

3. Craft a Backup Plan for Your Team

To keep your business running during or after a crisis, you need your technology, but you also need your team. If your contact center is flooded, where should your employees report to work? Do you have another office or business location they could use? Should they work

from home?

If your team isn't accustomed to working remotely, they'll need clear instructions for logging in to your VPN and any other enterprise systems. Of course, when your communications and other key business solutions are cloud-based, they won't need to jump through hoops to access the same tools they use at the office. They can get right to work, and IT can focus on disaster recovery rather than spending the day fielding questions about how to use the VPN.

4. Share Your Business Continuity Planning Steps

Once your plan is in place, spread the word. Ensure everyone knows exactly what to do and how to do it in case an emergency should arise. Consider creating a business continuity team to help spread information and act as points of contact if anyone has questions. You might also want to offer training sessions or evaluate your plan by conducting "fire drills." Be sure to put a copy of this information and training materials in a place where everyone can access it at any time — you know, somewhere cloud-based.

There's a lot you can control in business, but you can't control the weather or prevent disasters. The real test is how effectively you respond and recover.

Contact Vonage Business to learn more about how cloud-based communications supports business continuity.