

COVID-19 - Business Disaster Recovery Plan Tips And Best Practice

The logo for PLANERGY, featuring the word in blue capital letters with a small orange and blue graphic element above the 'Y'.A photograph of two business professionals, a man and a woman, both wearing white face masks. They are looking towards the right of the frame. The background is a blurred cityscape.

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Why It's Essential

The pandemic is just one example of a major issue that can throw a wrench in business operations. Outside of that, natural disasters are a concern for many areas.

Even with the threat of downtime, a lot of small businesses lack a documented disaster recovery plan.

If you find that you don't have the IT infrastructure to support data backup in the event of cyber-attacks, there's no better time to start disaster recovery planning.

When The Inevitable Occurs

In the event of a disaster - be a global pandemic, an earthquake, tornado, hurricane, fire, flood, or something else entirely, it's highly likely your company will experience power outages and service outages.

While there's not much you can do to avoid the disasters themselves, you can prepare your business processes ahead of time with disaster planning.

How do you protect your business? How do you keep your employees working without putting them in danger?

Develop disaster recovery plan and/or a business continuity plan. Business owners often find it is easiest to combine the two into a single plan.

Building Your Plans

Disaster recovery plans are intended to recover documentation and information you've lost as a result of disaster.

Part of the plan may involve using backup data storage with a cloud service provider.

It may also mean recovering physical property you need for operations, such as hard drives.

A business continuity plan (BCP) helps you find ways to adjust your business operations in the face of a changing economy. The current pandemic clearly demonstrates the need for fluidity in business.

With orders to stay home and people getting sick, the business needs a plan to survive.

Companies that are still operating are using their plans to adjust for reduced hours and reduced team members during shifts.

They need to adapt their recovery plans to include social distancing measures for staff safety. For most businesses, demand has shifted, and many businesses are looking to meet community needs in new ways.

Take for instance, several factories have pivoted away from their usual products to manufacture masks and hand sanitizer, or the restaurants are selling and delivering food stock (not just regular menu items) to patrons who are avoiding public spaces.

Still, certain businesses suffer, depending on the nature of the disaster at hand. While restaurants have been able to make adjustments to keep some business coming in, salons, tattoo parlors, and other "non-essential" businesses have been

forced to close - which puts a damper on business continuity.

When you consider that demand for gasoline has dropped since everyone is staying home, but demand for cleaning supplies and toilet paper is up, there's a major economic shift that causing worst-case scenario issues for many industries.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." - Benjamin Franklin

A disaster recovery plan can be arranged through four possible strategies:

- **Disaster Recovery as a Service** - The option where providers host a second site for all company data. They also provide other services to help you rebuild servers and applications to get you back up and running quickly.
- **Cloud-based Disaster Recovery** - This is one of the best recommended strategies for disaster recovery. All information is stored on the cloud and cannot be destroyed during a disaster. Cloud storage is beneficial to your team members who are working remotely. The ability to access important contracts, review data, and create new marketing campaigns will keep your business afloat.
- **Data Center Disaster Recovery** - It can be expensive to scan all documents and put everything on the cloud. Data centers can be the right answer when looking to store data offsite with easy access. This is a good measure for storing data while the company is uploading data to the cloud. If a catastrophe occurs and you haven't moved everything to the cloud, you can still access it all.
- **Virtualization Disaster Recovery** - Your applications, networks, and servers are too important to lose. The best option to back them up by making them virtual. If you lose the hardware, you can recover in less time than usual.

The great thing about these options is that you can use more than one. A disaster recovery plan to rebuild servers and virtualization of important applications will save your company.

Put the most important papers into the cloud and send off the rest to the data center.

By combining different types of recovery with a business continuance plan, you can save your business successfully.

You can avoid some disasters by being so prepared, like closings due to a pandemic. If a disaster does occur, you will be back on your feet quicker than your competitors.

The Key Elements You Don't Want To Ignore

Making a disaster recovery plan can be overwhelming and a difficult process. To make it simpler, focus on these major areas.

- Goals
- Planning team
- Capabilities
- Hazards
- Written documentation
- Action plans
- Staff training

The goals are a focus on solving a problem. You and your team will want to identify issues you have had in the past or likely to incur in the future. Be mindful of focusing on the most likely situations.

It isn't necessary to solve issues for a hurricane when you are in Iowa. You can always add to the goals as you realize new potential disasters over time.

Answer questions like "Where will we relocate?" and "What resources do we have for receiving funds for a rebuild?".

With pandemic situations, consider the effects of closing down to protect staff health and wellness. If you're an essential business, how can you remain open and still provide the best protection for your staff and customers?

How will you offer pay to your team so they will survive the cut in hours? A company who takes care of their employees during a pandemic will have loyal employees and customers.

Your team should consist of two groups - an employee-led planning team and an executive leadership team. The employees and volunteers create and execute policies on the ground.

The executive leadership team appoints recovery leadership and keep execution organized. These two teams work together to ensure everything goes as smoothly as possible.

It can help to reinforce a mission statement for the team members to remember what it is they are doing and why they are doing it.

Capabilities and hazards consider two things. What are you capable of doing during and after a disaster? What hazards can stand in that way? As time goes by, you need to consider how old the files are that you will need to recover.

An IT manager should be made a part of the discussion on realistic needs for recovery.

These are going to be very different depending on the disaster you are preparing for. Recovering from a fire may be similar to a tornado, but the hazards and capabilities can be different.

Action plans are dependent on the disaster scenario. For each disaster, there is a specific action plan for that situation. You won't treat an earthquake the same way as you would for a hurricane.

Each plan should lay out every step that must be taken in the best interest of the business and the employees. Things to consider is who will notify the CEO and who will notify employees?

Who will be onsite to clean up any messes? Who is going to make announcements and statements to the press regarding the status of the business?

Keep an up-to-date copy of written documentation available to employees at all times. This ensures they are aware protocols and policies during and after a disaster.

Share the information with management and allow them to communicate it to everyone else in meetings that cover the various possible scenarios. This helps everyone see your business processes are in place to keep the company (and their

jobs) as secure as possible no matter what.

Making efforts to reduce the length of time it takes to recover so that people aren't out of work for long is crucial.

Keeping a hard copy on hand helps the mind focus when stress levels are high and people aren't sure where to start.

Training your staff is vital to the success of your business continuity and disaster recovery plans.

Without it, the efforts will have been a waste of time. Many businesses run mock situations so that people can get a clear understanding of what to do. Teach your staff how to remain calm in order to follow protocol.

Training can also reveal your staff's strengths and weaknesses. Reassigning tasks to those with the appropriate strengths will solidify the plan. Help your staff overcome some weaknesses to strengthen the team as a unit.

These evaluations through mock emergencies will show you areas of improvement needed in your plan. Businesses have to be fluid and willing to make necessary changes over time to work most efficiently.

Always remember that it is important to prepare, rather than assume that something isn't likely to happen. Businesses weren't quite prepared for the pandemic and many of them are figuring it all out as they go along.

These plans are an investment in your business's sustainability and profitability. Investing in your business and employees will work out in your favor.

Review your plan on an annual basis. Run your mock situations to look for changes that must be made. Additional training may be necessary for new staff and established employees.

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