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Surviving the Storm



Although no small business owner likes to think about what could go wrong when business is running smoothly, there is no better way to survive a disaster than to plan ahead. Whether the danger to your business comes from flood, theft, or any other threat, a solid business resumption plan (BRP) will guide you efficiently through the necessary steps to get your business up and running as soon as possible. The sooner you are back in business, the better your chances of a complete recovery.

What is a BRP?

A BRP is a documented plan you follow when a disaster or emergency strikes your small business. The BRP collects important phone numbers, directions to predetermined meeting places, business inventory, and other important information all in one place. It is essentially a documentation of your business' functions, personnel, equipment and assets. In the event of an emergency, all the information you need will be in your hands, and you will have a plan to follow that you have already thought out and tested. Although it seems daunting to compile a BRP, you only have to create the backbone of it once and make minor updates later. It's worth the time and effort; you'll be able to put your business back on its feet with more ease following a disaster.

But what could go wrong?

Generally, all disasters involve losing information, access to facilities, or personnel. The following crises often result in such losses:

- **Natural disasters or energy crises** such as fire, flood, tornado, or loss of power, heat, or running water
- **Theft or security breaches** including break-ins, theft of sensitive information, hacker invasion or the spread of a disabling virus throughout the network
- **Failed technology** like the Web server or LAN going down
- **Loss of personnel** like an employee or several employees quitting, being fired, or laid off, or widespread illness such as a flu epidemic

Creating Your BRP

Even if the odds are slim, an emergency can happen – so you need to be prepared. Compiling a business resumption plan may take significant time and effort but it will allow you to put your small business back in motion quickly and efficiently, so it's worth it.

- **Take inventory.** Make an extensive inventory of your business, dividing it into computer hardware and software, furniture, office supplies, books, etc. Document the serial numbers of any items that have them. You might find it useful to take photographs of some of the items for your records. Estimate the cost of the items you list in your inventory as closely as possible. If you can't do the job yourself, appoint one person from each department to be responsible for recording the information in their department.
- **Establish an emergency meeting place.** Designate a meeting place near your building to gather if your staff shows up for work and the building is on fire or is unsafe. The meeting place should be close to your business and easy to find. Be sure to consider transportation issues such as who has a car and who relies on public transportation. A nearby hotel lobby or town hall might work for you. Whatever it is, make sure everyone knows where they are supposed to go and how to get there.
- **Create and maintain a contact list.** Compile contact information for all of your employees. Include a section of contacts for facilities, your insurance company, equipment manufacturers, major vendors or customers, and any other phone numbers you would need in an emergency.
- **Distribute and follow up.** Each employee should receive two copies of the BRP – one to keep at work and one to keep at home. Have them read through it entirely, and ask for their input. Plan regular monthly or quarterly meetings to review the document,

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Making the Most of Your BRP

- **Keep it current.** Your BRP is useless if it is outdated, so establish a routine or timeline for updating the BRP. It's a good idea to designate the last day of the month or quarter to review any recent hires, added equipment, change in phone numbers or business functions. Remember that a business resumption plan is a changing, evolving document. As you regularly update your BRP, it will serve as an accurate representation of your business and will provide you with the information you need to bounce back from a crisis.
- **Begin a data backup routine.** If you haven't already, establish a routine for backing up your server on a daily basis so, in the event of a disaster, you will only lose a day or two of work. It's best to use about a dozen of your chosen media in rotation, backing up on a different unit each night and keeping most of the units off-site. For further information on computer backup options, consult the SmallBiz article "[A Back Up Plan](#)".
- **Practice makes perfect.** Schedule mock disasters, whether quarterly, biyearly, or yearly. Make sure everyone arrives at your emergency meeting place. Go through the phone list to make sure the numbers are current.
- **Keep it off-site.** Don't keep originals of leases, titles, and other important documents in-house – make color copies and store the originals off-site in a fireproof location. You can store a few extra checks off-site as well; you may need them to purchase emergency supplies in the event of a disaster. And of course, keep a complete, up to date, bound copy of your business resumption plan at home. A fireproof safe in your home will safely store your BRP, original documents, and data back-up media.

It's natural to stay optimistic when your small business is running smoothly. But, if you want to continue to rest soundly and enjoy your profitable company, take an honest look at the possibility of disaster and create a planned response to those possibilities. A BRP can help you survive the storm and get your business back on track, running smoothly once again.

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