

Ten Steps to Resilient Business

Pointers to help make your organisation more resistant to the effects of major disruption

Lights

Business continuity is sometimes seen as an overhead. However, times are changing and many leading organisations now view it as a commercial asset, helping them win business. The following emphasise the importance and commonsense value of owning a viable business continuity plan.

- The operations director of a national newspaper surprised us by saying that the single most important part of her remit was ensuring that the firm's business continuity plan remained effective at all times. Her reasoning was that *"no-one else will take time to focus on it, yet if the worst happens, all eyes will be on me. I have to create the environment for operations to resume."*
- A well-known financial business asked us to automate their supplier due diligence assessment. It covers many small and medium-sized firms and asks detailed questions concerning their resilience capability. How long before your customers ask the same of you?

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Creating a continuity plan need not be difficult or expensive and it helps to have a well thought-out approach. The following ten points give a brief insight into what may be required.

1. **Gain top-level commitment.** Staff need to know this is important so you need top-level buy-in and good communications. Experience indicates that any investment will be wasted if you don't do this.
2. **Set a budget** that reflects the organisation's risk appetite and the time and money you are prepared to spend. This will determine the scope, range and balance of any measures you decide to adopt.
3. **Understand tolerance** and how long you can afford to be non-operational following an incident. Use this to set recovery objectives for each business activity. Work through worst-case scenarios to confirm this.
4. **Create capability.** For each scenario, identify ways of replacing lost components in each part of the business. Your recovery strategy becomes valid when the mix is affordable, workable and no gaps remain.
5. **Formulate an incident response** covering all major events that could realistically affect you. It should cover detailed aspects of detection, escalation, containment and mobilisation.
6. **Be ready to communicate.** Organisations fail in crisis because their customers desert them, starving them of cash and fuelling competition. Create a perception of stability and your prospects improve dramatically.
7. **Establish a crisis framework** for fast well-informed decisions. It should include checklists, contacts, operating information and technology-equipped premises with guaranteed access.
8. **Write practical plans.** Charge key business functions with writing their own recovery procedures. Ensure they meet all your tolerance deadlines and check carefully any assumptions they make.
9. **Commit to testing** your plan regularly. Use the test as a basis for improvement and make sure outcomes are followed-up. Make it an interesting and positive experience so staff are happy to do it again.
10. **Preserve what you built.** An outdated response plan becomes a misleading liability. Give someone the task of ensuring the plan never goes out of date and link this to testing.

Action

Carried out properly, continuity pays for itself. In the example above the business owner uses the plan as sales collateral to impress auditors, regulators investors and customers, creating certainty and confidence which translate into direct benefit. The same can apply for your business.

To find out more about how resilience can benefit your organisation, please contact us now.