

Business Continuity Management Plain & Simple How To Write A Business Continuity Plan (BCP)

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The Importance Of Business Continuity Management For Any Business (Even Small Businesses)

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is a roadmap to enable a business to continue operations under adverse conditions, such as an unforeseen disaster or other unplanned interruption to the business. This includes:

- □ Natural Disasters, such as: bad weather, flooding, earthquake, disease, etc.
- □ Man-made business interruptions, such as: labor strikes, power outages, arson, theft, terrorism, trade embargo, etc.
- □ Any other identified risk to the business, such as: critical supplier closes their doors unrepentantly

Business continuity planning is a process of identifying the potential risks to your business and then evaluating how to prepare for these so that if they do happen, your business can continue to be viable, or resilient. This means that you are still able to operate at some level needed to meet customer needs and you are able to resume normal operations at a defined point in the future. Lack of adequate BCP means that a disaster could put you out of business permanently.

This is not the same thing as IT disaster recovery. IT disaster recovery involves making sure your computer systems can continue to function and your data is still available in the event that your primary systems go down; if a fire wipes out your server room for example or a massive blackout disables your primary network routers. Typically your IT service provider will provide you with options for backup hosting at other sites as part of Disaster Recovery Planning (DRP). Large companies with big IT departments in different locations can manage DRP internally by having backup servers at different sites.

DRP is an important part of BCP, but BCP goes beyond just IT systems and looks at the entire business structure and operations. It is critical that the IT system continue to function after a disaster, but if there is no one available or able to use these systems then how will the business continue to operate? BCP seeks to answer the big-picture questions such as:

- □ In the event of a disaster where will your people work from?
- □ If downed trees and power lines cut off major roadways needed for distributing your product what will you do?
- □ If a swine flu outbreak keeps 3/4 of your staff at home can your business still function?

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- How will you communicate with your customers? And employees?
- What happens if one of your key suppliers has a disaster and cannot get you the components you need to make your product?
- How quickly to you need to be back in operation? What is the priority for restoring each area/project/process? How much will this cost / how much is at stake if the process is down?

This is what business continuity management looks at; being prepared for the unplanned interruptions. Making advance preparations just in case of disaster is good business, but it does involve some cost, which can be significant. This is where cost-conscious organizations and businesses with limited budgets have major concerns. The result can be avoidance or undue risk-taking; hoping for the best because it just costs too much to be adequately prepared. This need not be the case. Spending a lot of money to set up a BCP does not make it more value added nor better for your business. Taking a logical approach that makes sense for your business and understanding the risks does make a BCP more value-added.

To be effective and value-added the level of preparation needs to be evaluated against the potential risk. This is what good business continuity management will evaluate. The BCP needs to be created after carefully looking at each critical business operation and identifying the associated level of risk should this operation go down. In addition, there needs to be a thorough evaluation of the options for maintaining business operations in the event of a disaster; i.e. backup or contingency plans.

The evaluation of your business or organization should begin with your mission and your stakeholders / customers. You need to clearly describe why you do what you do / why you are in business?

Next, you need to define your customers' / stakeholders' requirements and what your organization needs to be able to do to meet these. Basically, the importance of each task / operation you do.

Then you need to figure out what would happen if each of these tasks / operations went down or offline. What if manufacturing stopped because there was no power? Or an accident delayed or destroyed your parts shipment? Or a hacker took down your ordering system or your website? Questions to ask are:

- What would this cost the business in hard costs (dollars lost) and soft costs (loss of credibility or reputation with customers)?
- How likely are these types of unplanned events? (ex. If you have a server room near a river, it may be at risk for flooding).
- How long can you afford to be without this operation running? (when does the cost of having a backup in place make sense)

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In BCP lingo the answers to these questions define your Recovery Time Objective (RTO - how long can you wait until you must have the operation restored) and Business Impact Analysis (BIA – what effect does losing the operation have on the business immediately and over time).

Based on this information gathered, an effective and realistic BCP can be created which will effectively help the business to survive and operate during an unforeseen interruption or disaster.

The critical elements of the plan must include not just the IT systems but also:

- Personnel/employees: where will people work from? How will they do their work?
- Production: Where will you produce your products if your main facility is down? Is there a qualified backup facility? How quickly can it come online? Do you need to have inventory on hand? Do you need a contract with this facility, just in case you need them?
- Distribution: How will you get your product to your customers if your facility is down? Or if roads are inaccessible?
- Communications (both internal and external) with customers, vendors, media, local authorities and governmental regulators – **this is one of the most critical elements of an effective BCP.**

All of these details need to be considered up front before a disaster happens. Think about all your daily recordkeeping and administrative tasks. If you do not pay your taxes or your bank loans because your records are under water, you may not be in business after the water level goes down. If you cannot pay suppliers, you may not have products to make. If you cannot communicate with customers, they may go to competitors.

Big businesses have readily adopted this strategy and brought in consulting firms and purchased enterprise software to set up and manage BCPs. This has created the biggest opportunity for disaster-planning consultants since Y2K. The down side is that the price tag for having a firm set up and manage a BCP can go into the \$100,000's. For small businesses, this is too cost prohibitive but BCP is still critical and this should not deter small businesses from seriously thinking about what they would do in the event of a disaster.

Rather than paying out big\$\$\$ for a team of consultants or licensing enterprise software, small businesses can benefit from following the same logical thinking that the consultants use.

BCP firms typically come into a client with a standard set of templates (a basic generic roadmap for the BCP) which identifies all the potential risks and key operations in a business (paying vendors, manufacturing, customer service, regulatory filings, etc). The consultants then interview key individuals in each

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area and ask them how important each operation they perform is (how long can the business survive without it?). Then they ask these same people what the options are to keep this operation going if a disaster happens (can you outsource it? To whom? Can you buy extra supplies and keep them somewhere else?).

Then with this information, the consultants modify the standard templates as needed to suit the situation. The final modified templates are presented as a customized BCP plan to the business management, who ultimately makes the decisions on what they will support in terms of what steps will be put into place and how much money will be spent.

The bulk of the specific actionable information in the BCP comes from the business, not the consultants. The BCP templates provide a guide to prompt the appropriate discussions and ask the right questions. So armed with a basic BCP template, a small business owner can perform this same procedure and come up with an effective BCP on their own or with the help of conscientious person (not necessarily a BCP consultant).

Although the process of setting up and managing a BCP seems very complicated and/or prohibitively expensive for small businesses, it does not need to be.

There are materials and resources available that would greatly help out the small businesses to be prepared for the unforeseen without the need to spend large sums of money.

Critical Elements of a Business Continuity Plan (What Every Successful BCP Must Have)

So what are the standards for Business Continuity Planning? If you boil down any of the BCPs and templates floating around out there, you will find there are certain critical elements which all must address. If you can address these critical elements in your plan, then it will be effective.

The critical elements of a BCP which need to be addressed include:

- (1) Data back-up and recovery (critical information such as customer records, tax records, etc. Both in hard copy and electronic).
- (2) Mission critical systems (IT systems needed to conduct business).
- (3) Internal communications with employees.
- (4) External communications with emergency services, media, service providers, regulatory agencies and vendors.
- (5) Customer service.
- (6) Facilities needed for production, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution.
- (7) Physical work locations of employees.
- (8) Identification of BCP roles and responsibilities.
- (9) Objectives for activation, deactivation and recovery times for critical business operations.
- (10) Ongoing testing and review of the BCP.

These are the big ticket items that you must have answers to before a disaster happens. If you can get a handle on these, your BCP will provide you with value added information to help get you through a disaster.

Before You Get Started Writing A BCP – Get Clear On Your Strategy

So how do you get started setting up a BCP if you never had one before? And if you do not want to exhaust your budget or profits?

You can do this with or without outside help but you do need a basic outline of the key areas you need to cover. One way to do this is to hire a consultant to help guide you through this exercise. This may run into some big \$\$\$ but it is important and it may be well worth the investment to ensure your continued success in the future.

Just one word of advice on this or any other plan for setting up a BCP – please ensure that everyone is on board with this and takes this seriously and understands the importance of the BCP. I have seen too many organizations which just pay a company to come in and set up a BCP so they can say they have one and check this off the to-do list. The problem is that everyone involved within the organization took this as an annoying extra job to do and just gave it a half-hearted attempt to provide any valuable ideas or information. The result is that the organization now owns a \$10,000+ set of excellent looking documents which may or may not help in the event of a disaster – but they will never know until a disaster happens because they do not want to bother to spend too much more time testing it nor keeping it up to date. This is really a shame to see good money spent this way.

The other option, which may be better suited to small businesses or non-profit organizations, is to start asking some basic questions and come up with an outline of the key areas which need to be evaluated in creating the BCP.

Your first step in creating a value added business continuity plan, regardless whether you do this yourself or hire a consultant, is to come up with a business continuity management (BCM) strategy, basically a plan for creating the plan. The reason for this is that while BCP's are important and they solve many problems which help to avoid costs in the future, they do cost something to create and test and maintain right now, so before jumping into writing the Business Continuity Plan (BCP), you first need to look at your business/organization and make a determination of what your BCP needs to accomplish and make sure this aligns with your business/organization's objectives.

The result of this exercise is a clear vision of the requirements and priorities for the BCP which focus on what is really important first. This greatly reduces

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unnecessary cost and time spent trying to create contingencies for everything. While that would be great if you could just walk away from a disaster scenario and switch on all your backup processes and keep working like nothing happened, this is not realistic.

It is just not possible to have redundancy and remediation plans for everything at once. The cost and time required to set all this up would be prohibitive. Either that or it would just look good on paper, but when required to implement it will not deliver the results you expected. A business continuity management strategy will ensure you are focused on the right things in the right order. This will save a lot of time and headache, and money, later on. What's involved in a BCM strategy? It's just a list of basic questions to answer to steer you on the right path.

So let's get started.

The answer to these questions are the keys which will drive you to create the best business continuity plan for your business/organization. The questions you need to ask within your business/organization are:

1. What is the Purpose / Mission of our business/organization (Why Are We In Business? What Do We Do)?
2. Who are our customers / stakeholders?
3. What do our customers / stakeholders require in the event of a disaster or unplanned interruption to our operations?
4. What operations / business processes need to be covered by BCP to ensure we meet our obligations to our customers / stakeholders?
 - a. What are the consequences of interruptions to each of the operations noted?
 - b. How long can we be without the items before bad things happen?
5. Who will own the BCP?
6. What is the BCP budget?
7. Who will provide leadership and support of the BCP initiatives?
8. How will the BCP be maintained to keep it current?
9. How / when will BCP testing be conducted?
10. How will lessons learned / ongoing improvements to the BCP be managed?

Once you have answered all of these questions, you will have a clear idea of why you need a BCP, what needs to be included/prioritized in the BCP (what are the most critical operations to get back up on line first), how much you can afford to spend on BCP and how it will be managed moving forward.

Once you are clear on all of those items, then you can begin to start writing the BCP.

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Writing An Effective BCP

Basic information which should go into a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) include:

- Organization charts – How your organization is structured. Who reports to whom, what each person does.
- Roles and responsibilities – Who is responsible for each part of the BCP, including managing the plan and coordinating the activation and deactivation.
- Communication plans – How to reach people during a disaster.
- Business risk analysis – The consequences of losing a system / site / operation and how likely this is.
- Business impact analysis – How much will it cost the business to lose a system / site / operation after day 1, day 2, day 5, day 10...?
- Plan Activation - Steps for activating the BCP, who does what in what order?
- Plan Deactivation - Steps of deactivating the BCP and going back to normal operations.
- Testing – How will the BCP be tested to make sure it works as you intended? How often will this happen?
- Review / ongoing improvements – Who will review the BCP, keep it up to date with current technology and operations, and make improvements as new information is gathered? How often will this happen?
- Approvals – Who will approve and own the BCP?

An explanation of an effective plan follows:

Plan Overview and Contact Information

1. Plan Summary

The purpose of the Plan Summary is to identify the name of the company or organization for which this plan applies and to explain the purpose of the plan (what it is designed to accomplish).

The plan summary summarizes all of the key areas that the plan addresses. This is important for presenting this plan to auditors and regulatory authorities. They will want documentation to provide evidence that you have covered all the important bases in your business. Critical elements to consider in implementing a BCP plan include the items listed below, as applicable to your particular business and situation:

- Data back-up and recovery (hard copy and electronic).
- Continuation of all mission critical business operations.

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- Operational assessments (impacts to business resulting from interruptions to key business operations).
- Alternate communications between customers and the business.
- Alternate communications between the business management and its employees, contractors and suppliers.
- Alternate physical location of employees.
- Regulatory reporting.

2. Plan Approval

All BCP plans must be approved by at least one individual in a senior company management role. This provides evidence that the business is committed to enacting and enforcing the BCP plan (it is just not a stack of papers that they asked someone to write up and print out to satisfy the auditors).

3. BCP Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

Every BCP plan must have specific roles and responsibilities assigned and agreed to before the plan is approved. In the event of an emergency, each person must already be aware of what their responsibility when the BCP plan is activated or the plan will fail. Once an emergency occurs, it is too late to try to figure this out.

BCP teams are typically broken out by functional area (i.e. Sales, IT, Production) or by site (i.e. Building 1, Building 2, or First Floor, Second Floor, or Springfield office St. Louis Office...). This depends on the size and structure of your organization. If you have a small organization, everyone can be on one team. The goal is to keep the tasks manageable such that the team can be activated and perform their duties quickly and effectively in the event of an emergency. If the team is too big or too spread out, this may lead to time delays due to communication lag time and taking on tasks that are too big. Ultimately it is up to the owner of the BCP to decide how to structure the teams. These are just points to consider.

The key responsibilities to consider in setting up the teams are the leadership assignments and responsibilities, and identifying team membership for each person in the organization. Before an emergency occurs, each person must know who they are to report to and each leader must know who they are responsible for.

The key leadership responsibilities must include:

- Who is responsible for activating and deactivating the BCP plan. In the event of an emergency, there must be one primary person who has this responsibility. Activating the BCP plan has significant financial and operation impacts to the business and only a person authorized to make this call should activate the plan. This person must be in a position of authority to have the business information they need in order to be able to make an informed decision to activate the plan. They must also be in a position to quickly

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receive notification of any events which could trigger the BCP (i.e. Fire, Massive power outage, earthquake, chemical spill, etc.).

- Who is responsible to provide leadership and decision making authority to BCP team upon activation of the BCP plan, until plan is deactivated. This can be the same person who activates the plan and leads the team. This is up to you to decide, but you must spell this out or else there will be mass confusion when an emergency strikes. People need to know clearly who to take direction from. There needs to be one identified authority to do this.
- Who will manage external communications between the company and outside parties and internal communications between the BCP team and company personnel. This is the person who receives and sends information to and from others inside and outside the company. This includes sending/receiving information to/from local emergency management personnel/police/fire department/etc. and for overseeing communications of BCP/emergency information to/from company personnel. In the event of an emergency, there must be a clear line of communication and everyone needs to know where to go to accurate and clear information. Without planning this critical piece of the BCP plan, the resulting frenzy of informal communications will cause massive confusion and panic. This needs to be avoided or else the plan will fail.
- Who is responsible for the BCP plan itself; the BCP plan administrator. This is the person who owns and manages the BCP plan to ensure it is current and accessible in the event of an emergency. This is a key role which needs to be taken seriously as a primary responsibility to get this plan in place and keep it up to date. Ensure review and testing is performed and documented on a regular basis. This means the plan is checked to make sure the information is still current and accurate. Also, make sure that the plan is tested out to make sure it will work and to find out where revisions or additions need to be made to fill any gaps uncovered during testing. This is not just something do when time permits, or else it will not get done or it will get out of date and then when an emergency strikes, you will be out of luck trying to scramble to find out what information is current and what is not. Time is money and the time you put in up front to get this plan in shape will pay off later on when you need it to be correct the first time you activate it.
- Who is in charge of each sub team (Functional Lead). These are the people who are responsible for leading each of the BCP teams as described above.
- **VERY IMPORTANT:** For each of these roles described above there must be a primary and a backup person identified. In the event that the primary person is not available or unable to perform their role, the backup person must take that role. The backup person must be made aware that they have been designated as the backup person for their specific role before the emergency happens. They must have access to the same information as the primary person, has and they must take part in all BCP training and testing exercises so that if needed in an emergency they can step into the primary role without any lag time.

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4. Internal Contact Information

In the event of an emergency or disaster, it is critical to have contact information for all personnel to be able to quickly share important information as it becomes available and to quickly account for all personnel. The most useful format for this information, in the event of an emergency, is to set it up as one or multiple contact trees (depending on how big your organization is).

The contact tree is a structured hierarchical format with multiple levels which look like a pyramid if you draw them in a diagram.

The critical pieces are:

- Each person is assigned a specific box in the contact tree.
- There are defined levels to ensure clear direction of communication.
- The tree is designed to map a logical grouping of individuals (i.e. by function, by department, by site).
- The tree is designed to distribute the tasks of making contact (i.e. no one person does all the work). Ideally each person should have 1-5 contacts to make.
- Each box is clearly associated with levels above and below.
- Each person knows who will contact them, and in turn who they will contact.
- Multiple means of contact are identified for each person (daytime and off-hour phone, cell phone, email, etc.) so that if one means of contact does not work another can be attempted.
- Special skills are identified which could be vitally important in an emergency situation (i.e. who is a doctor, paramedic, fire fighter, etc. who can be asked to help tend to any urgent situations).
- There is a confirmation that loops back up the tree to ensure that all the people in the tree are accounted for, or to alert the top level that people cannot be accounted for. It is not enough just to call down the tree and presume that everyone has gotten the message; you need to know for sure that everyone has been reached.

This is one of the most important pieces of the BCP. Without basic communications, the rest of the plan will fail. Be sure this section can easily be printed out and provided to all personnel in the tree. In the event of an emergency, each person needs to access this plan quickly and must not be dependent on any electronic or online systems which may not be functional. A .pdf copy is not sufficient if the power is out or you cannot get to your computer.

This is how the contact tree works -

- In the event of an emergency, the BCP leadership contacts the person at the top of the tree (Level 1).
- The Level 1 person then contacts the assigned people in the tree one level down (Level 2).

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- The Level 2 people then contact the people assigned to them one level down (Level 3).
- Once the Level 2 people have contacted (or attempted to contact) all the Level 3 people assigned to them, they then contact the Level 1 person above them to report the status (All People Accounted For or People Not Accounted For) and any question or information to be shared.

This provides confirmation that the contact tree has reached all the affected individuals and that everyone is accounted for. The Level 1 person at the top of the tree is then responsible for reporting back to the BCP Leadership the status of people in their contact tree and conveying any information they need to share.

The contact tree can be set up various ways depending on what makes sense to your organization such as supervisor with associated personnel below, or it make more sense to have a level 1 site person with assigned people at the same site below (for organizations where reporting structures span multiple locations).

The contact tree can be expanded (more levels added) for larger groups. Multiple contact trees can be set up for multiple groups, functions, or locations.

The contact tree should be structured structure to identify each person within the organization and to provide instructions on what to do in the event the contact tree is activated. Information about each person should include how to reach them through multiple means (phone, email, text, etc) and at different times (work hours, after work hours, etc). It is also very useful to note any special skills or training each person has (i.e. paramedic, firefighter, doctor, nurse, etc.) in the event their services are needed in an emergency.

5. External Contact Information (Customers)

This section documents contact information for your customers. In the event of an emergency, you must be able to continue to communicate with your customers in order for the business to continue. To be prepared for this, you need to have a list of your customers and key information. This should include at a minimum their name and contact information and information about any orders/contracts they have with your business. This list can be documented in a report from one of your systems. Depending on how big your business is, you may choose to have only the very top customers' information documented in portable format (i.e. printed out so you can take it with you) and have the rest of the customers' information saved in a computerized system (which has a backup/disaster recovery plan in place to ensure you can access a copy of this data in the event that the primary system is not functional). The bottom line here is that in the event you need to contact a customer or client in an emergency situation, you can still do it.

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6. External Contact Information (Suppliers and Business Service Providers)

This section documents information you will need to keep in contact with your service providers and suppliers. These include suppliers of services or materials needed by your business, legal services, business services, etc. These contacts will be especially important in the event of an emergency (i.e. contacting the insurance company in the event of disaster or notifying your suppliers of alternate work locations) so it is important to have the information easily accessible. It is best to have this in one list, which includes the names and contact information as well as account or policy numbers you will need to identify yourself. It is not advisable to rely on multiple sources for this information of old documents (i.e. bills, brochures, quotes) as these will take time to find or may not be accessible at all during an emergency. One option would be to scan these documents and create a single .pdf which you can copy (keep a backup in an alternate location) and print out to keep with you. Another would be if you have this information in a database or computer system, run a report which summarizes the information you need and print this out to keep with you.

7. Utilities and Facilities Services

This section is very similar to section 6 but focuses on utility companies and facilities services such as leasing companies. It is very important to have this information easily at hand in the event of an emergency where you might need to contact the utility company to shut off service or report an outage etc.

8. Financial Services Contact Information

This section documents the information you will need to communicate with financial services (i.e. Bank, payroll and benefits services, etc.) and access your accounts. In the event of an emergency or disruption to business requiring relocation, it is imperative to maintain contact with financial institutions to enable continuation of payments to employees, suppliers and service providers, as well as processing payments from customers.

The list must contain the names and contact information for all of your financial services so that you have this in one place easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Sensitive information such as account numbers, log on IDs, PINs and passwords are important to be able to access your accounts but you probably do not want these printed out on a list that some can copy and use to get into your accounts. So the best way to manage this is to designate key individuals in your organization who have these pieces of information and are responsible for managing them and keeping them confidential. For purposes of the BCP plan you then need to identify the individuals (make sure you have a primary and a backup person identified) who is responsible for managing the account and password for each financial service. In the event of an emergency, this person would be contacted and asked to access the account and perform whatever management needs them to perform to keep the business operating. This is another reason why the contact tree is so vitally important because you want to be sure you can contact these people.

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9. Regulatory Agency Contact Information

This sections documents contact information for regulatory agencies and authorities such as IRS, Tax departments, local authorities and other regulatory bodies depending on your business (i.e. .FDA, EPA, DEP, Customs, Licensing agencies, etc. as applicable). It is critical to maintain communications with regulatory agencies during emergencies to enable reporting of business status affecting required regulatory filings or reporting time sensitive business critical information to regulatory agencies. You don't want to add to your troubles by getting behind on renewing your license to manufacture your product or paying your taxes because you cannot locate the information you need because it is on a computer which you lost in a flood.

10. Critical Records and Systems

This section identifies your business critical records and systems. This includes paper files and compute system which contain business critical data (such as orders, financial transactions, product specifications, product manuals, software source code, etc.). For all of these records and systems you need to have a backup system and/or location identified and documented in a list that is easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Backup locations and systems include paper copies, microfilm or scanned copies of paper documents stored at an alternate location, and system data and software backed up on DVD's or tapes etc. and stored at an alternate location.

It is not necessary to document system IDs and passwords here (unless you want to) but at a minimum you need to identify who has the necessary system IDs and passwords, pin, keys, combinations, etc. to be able to access the records/systems. Be sure to identify a primary and backup person here.

Ideally backup copies of systems and data should be copied onto multiple media. Most modern libraries that backup irreplaceable data use multiple media such as optical media (CDs, DVDs) plus magnetic media (Tapes, Hard Drives) and solid state media (Memory Stick, Jump/Flash/Thumb Drive). With the emergence of cloud computing, the new trend is towards online storage which is accessible anywhere on the Internet. Services of this type are provided by companies like Amazon or Online Mailbox. The important piece to consider is that you need to be able to access important information and you should not rely too heavily on just one media because there are multiple causes of failure for each type (i.e. Tapes can be demagnetized, CDs can warp if exposed to heat, Jump drive will fail if they get wet, etc.).

For all of the storage media options and for copies of paper document, at least one copy of these needs to be kept in an alternate location away from your primary work location just in case you cannot access your primary work location. Having your critical files in a fireproof safe which is in your office which you cannot get to because of an evaluation due to a massive chemical spill is not

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going to help you. You need a copy that is either with you at all times or in a location away from the primary location. The general rule is that the backup location should be approximately 20-50 miles away from the primary location (close enough so that you can get to it easily but far enough away so that it is not affected by the disaster). The backup location should ideally be protected from theft, fire and water damage and should ideally be climate controlled (temperature and humidity are controlled to minimize damage to your records and media). There are companies such as Iron Mountain who provide this type of service.

11. Backup Locations

This section documents the backup work locations identified which are to be used in the event of an emergency which prevents work from happening at the primary location. Some tasks can be performed remotely such as in a home office (i.e. Sales functions or technical writing) but others will require backup locations (i.e. manufacturing, laboratory work). Identification of backup locations and agreement on the terms of using the backup locations need to be defined and documented before the BCP plan is finalized.

These considerations include:

- □ Space requirements vs. availability
- □ Qualification/certifications required to perform the work at the backup location
- □ POs /payments/contracts of financial agreements required
- □ Time needed between notification and occupying the backup location
- □ Using internal personnel at backup location or outsourcing the operation entirely

The purpose of this section is to ensure continuation of critical business functions during activation of the BCP plan. During an emergency you want to know who to contact to get business operations moving quickly. You cannot afford to be researching options for resuming business operations. Backup/contingency locations must be identified for all essential operations which cannot be performed remotely (at home). Backup sites should be far enough away from the primary work site to reduce the chances that the disaster will affect access to the backup site, but not so far as to prevent timely access by personnel. A general rule is for the backup site to be 20-50 miles from the primary site. Backup site information in the BCP plan must include directions instructing personnel how to get to the location.

Directions and Maps to all backup locations need to be included in the Appendix Section of the BCP to be able to easily provide copies to all personnel who need to report to the backup locations.

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12. Backup Service Provider and Supplier Information

This section documents a list of your emergency/backup suppliers. These are the people or companies you would go to in the event that you cannot use your normal or primary suppliers either because you have moved work locations during an emergency or because there is an emergency at the primary supplier which makes them unable to help you.

In the event of an emergency or disruption to primary business services and suppliers, a list of back up services and suppliers must be maintained for quick reference to enable restoration of essential business functions in a timely manner. This list should include backup suppliers for essential functions necessary for the business to operate, such as computer services, shipping, order processing, etc.

13. Emergency Services Contact Information

This section is a basic list of emergency services such as police, fire, etc. In any emergency situation, it is essential to know who to contact. This information must be on hand for easy availability. List all critical emergency contact information in the table below so you have it all in one place for easy access.

Business Risk Assessment and Impact Evaluation

This section of the BCP plan documents the risk associated with the disruption of any key business operation or process. Risk is defined as the combination of how likely a key operation will be disrupted, how much time before the business experiences the negative impact of losing the operation, and how much this disruption will hurt the business performance. (Ex. The manufacturing plant can be shutdown for several months in the event that the river running through the property overflows and floods the building. Some flooding has occurred once every 3 years with major flooding occurring on average every 25 years. This will result in loss of sales within 2 days).

The information documented in this section is used to justify the prioritization of the BCP plan activities and justify the money allocated to ensuring the continued operations during an emergency or disaster. (Ex. A backup manufacturing site is qualified and PO-##### is issued to Company Z to enable startup of production within 1 day in the event of an emergency at the primary manufacturing facility. A new manufacturing site has been identified and a project initiated to relocate primary manufacturing to this site by 15-JUN-20##).

The more these figures can be quantified, the better will be the BCP decision-making.

To assist in this evaluation, use the scale indicated in the chart below.

Once this section is complete, this information will provide a roadmap for prioritizing the BCP tasks.

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The result will be a list of key business operations/processes with risk levels assigned. The operations/processes with the lowest risk numbers will have the highest risk level. The high risk items are the ones which should receive the most attention when designing and implementing the BCP plan. These are the items which will hurt the business the most if they are not adequately addressed.

14A. Business Process Risk Evaluation

This section documents the risk associated with each business operation or process. In order to create a BCP plan that is effective and manageable it is important to understand the relative risk associated with an interruption to each critical business operation so that the BCP plan can address restoring these operations in a prioritized ordered approach.

It is impossible to go from a disaster which interrupts your business to bringing everything back online all at once. There is so much to manage and many limitations during emergencies that you need to be very clear before the emergency happens what your priorities are. If you lost your primary work site, what operation/function would you need to bring back first? Second? Third? Etc.

The critical elements of completing this section are:

- □ Identifying the key business operations and processes. These are operations or process which must be working in order for the business to continue. Examples are customer service, processing orders, shipping product, etc.
- □ Identifying the likelihood of disruption (chances that something unexpected could happen which disrupts the key business operation or process). SCALE: 1 – 10 (1 = Very High Likelihood of Unplanned Disruption, 10 = Very Low Likelihood of Unplanned Disruption)
- □ Identifying how significant the effect is of losing this operation or process. (i.e. people at risk, profits lost, customers lost) SCALE: 1 – 10 (1 = Very High Significance To The Business, 10 = Very Low Significance To The Business). Identifying how long this operation can be disrupted before it begins to negatively impact the business. Number of Days without this operation before business would experience any negative impact to operations and/or sales.

14B. Business Process Disruption Impact Evaluation

In this section, the impact to the business of disruptions must be evaluated for each critical business operation identified in Section 14A. The object here is to define how much of an impact will disruption of each critical business process have on the business.

This must be defined in terms of:

- □ Available work-arounds to temporarily replace the process (ex. paper records can be processed manually in the event that a key computer system is unavailable, process can be outsourced to Company X).

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- A workaround is a manual process or other way to accomplish what needs to be done in the event that the primary process is unavailable. For example, you can take orders on paper forms if the computer system is down or you can manually produce a product if the automated production line is down, etc.
 - If there is a workaround, there will be less impact to the business as the BCP plan should specify that the workaround is activated in the event that the operation/process is disrupted. The BCP plan should include instructions on how to perform the workaround.
 - If there is not a workaround, the impact to the business will be greater because when the primary operation/process is interrupted your business will feel the effects (i.e. sales lost, no more orders taken, etc.)
- How long can the business continue to operate until the process must be restored? (ex. computer system must be back online within 3 months or costs and loss of efficiency will reach unsustainable levels).
 - This is not the same as the question in section 14A (how long before the business begins to feel the effect of a disruption to the operation). This is how long before you decide the process must be restored. This is different because due to priorities and economic/resource limitations, you need to make the proactive decision to wait a certain period of time before taking action to restore this operation due to the cost and resource considerations this will have vs. the risk of waiting. The information documented in Section 14A (how long until the business begins to feel the negative effect to the operation) is a key piece of information needed to make an informed decision on how long to wait until restoring the operation. Other operations may take priority.
 - This needs to be decided and documented before an emergency happens.
 - What resources are needed for the work-around and for restoration of the process?
 - In order to effectively plan for restoring a critical business operation, you need to know what resources (people, time, materials, supplies, money) are needed.
 - This information needs to be documented in advance of an emergency so that when you need to activate the BCP plan you know right away what you need. Even better, you can put together some of these supplies and materials ahead of time and have it ready just in case.

List the Key Business Processes in order of BCP Priority (lowest number first) using the information identified in the table in question 14A. The objective here is to identify which processes require the most immediate attention in the event of a disruption and what is required to address the disruption.

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Pre-Emergency Planning

15. Risk Mitigation

The best way to prevent getting caught in a disaster is to take proactive action and see what you can do to prevent a potential disaster or at least minimize the impact. For example if you identified that storing flammable materials, such as spray paint and paint thinner, near your hot water heater (which is heated by gas and has an open flame) could result in starting a fire, your mitigation action would be to move the flammable materials to a safe location to reduce the risk of a fire starting.

This same logical approach needs to be taken with your business. If you find that you have data that is not backed up or if you have computer systems which are vulnerable to viruses or unauthorized access, you need to either determine that the risk is acceptable or take action now to reduce your identified risk as best you can. Not every risk must be mitigated. Some are not possible to mitigate so they need to be planned for in your BCP, some are too costly to mitigate, and some may not carry a high enough risk for you to spend resources on mitigating. Only you can determine this, but you need to go through this exercise so you can make informed decisions and plan accordingly.

16. Emergency Materials and Supplies

To prepare in advance for an emergency, it is vital to have emergency supplies on hand and easily accessible to the people who need them. This should include critical emergency materials and supplies that need to be available in the event of an emergency or unplanned business interruption. This includes small disposable supplies (i.e. pens, paper, mailing supplies, etc.), office equipment (computers, printers, phones, etc.), production equipment (i.e. machinery needed to service customers, refrigerator, freezer, generator, batteries, tools, etc.) as well as raw materials and production supplies (i.e. paper, paint, lawn fertilizer, baking ingredients, gasoline, propane, etc.).

In the previous section, you identified what supplies are needed to restore each business operation. Now that you know what you need, you must decide how much of this you will acquire and keep on hand before an emergency happens. This is determined based on the cost of keeping in emergency supplies on hand versus risk of not having them. Only you can determine this.

Some supplies can be easily obtained if needed in a hurry but others are more difficult. During a flood, I know from experience it is impossible to find sump pumps or generators. Even the large suppliers like Home Depot and Lowes ran out of sump pumps and generators and did not expect more for another week, and they had a waiting list of people wanting them. Meanwhile the water level was rising in my newly finished basement. Consider this when completing this section.

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BCP Plan Activation and Implementation

In this section, identify the triggers for activating the BCP plan (what events must occur in order to activate the BCP plan), who is involved in activating the BCP plan, and what are the steps to activate and implement the plan. All key business processes identified in Section 14A should be listed in Section 16 in order of BCP priority.

Start times should be specified based on impact evaluation information captured in section 14B (ex. if production line downtime causes loss of customer orders within 2 days, then trigger is that production line is down for more than 1 day and target start time for production operation BCP should be specified to have a backup process in place within 2 days).

17. Plan Activation

This is the section which needs to contain the specific trigger for activating the BCP plan.

It must clearly identify:

- What needs to happen in order for the BCP plan to be activated?
- Who is responsible for activating the BCP plan (the primary and backup person)?
- Which BCP plan (the instructions for addressing the disaster) are to be followed?
- Which contact tree needs to be activated to notify the proper individuals of BCP activation?

It is disruptive and can be expensive to activate a BCP plan, so you need to be clear up front what situations warrant the activation of the BCP. Activating a BCP is not appropriate for every interruption. For example, if there are downed wires that knock out power for 6 hours to your primary manufacturing site, this may or may not be enough to activate the BCP.

You need to decide this based on the risk evaluation. This depends on how long you can be without the operation versus how long it would take to get the backup operation going and how much it would cost. You may decide you can afford to wait for up to 2 days without power before activating the BCP. But you need to do this evaluation and document the trigger up front before the emergency happens. If you know you can wait 2 days, then the appropriate action is to start counting the time from when the power is interrupted and at 2 days you need to activate the BCP plan if the power is not coming back on.

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Having a plan is not enough; you need to be sure when to use it in order for it to be effective otherwise you could be wasting time, effort, and money by needlessly panicking for no reason.

18. Plan Implementation

This section provides the instruction for carrying out the BCP plan. It needs to be very clear and easy to follow. It is highly recommended that one plan is written for each critical business. The plans should be written clearly in stepwise format (i.e. Do Step 1, then Step 2, then Step 3). For each step there needs to be a person assigned to do this step, so one assumes someone else is taking care of something (and then no one does).

It is also good practice to have a signoff for each step so you have written confirmation that a step has been completed. This is especially helpful in reviewing BCP implementations and tests to see what worked well and what needs improvement. This is also very helpful for BCP plans which involve handoffs (i.e. person A completes Step 1 and then Person B completes Step 2).

BCP Plan Deactivation and Restoration of Normal Operations

This section defines what happens once the emergency situation has passed or is no longer an impact to the business. The objective here is to return to normal business operations. First you will need to define what must happen in order for you to begin the process of returning to normal business operations or to a longer term solution (the BCP deactivation trigger), and then you need to define what the instructions/steps are to deactivate the BCP and return to normal operations (deactivation implementation/return to normal operations).

This section is set up just like the BCP Activation and Implementation section above but it is to provide instructions on the opposite process. Your objective is to be able to get back to a normal mode of business and you need to know when and how to deactivate BCPs as soon as it is appropriate.

19. BCP Plan Deactivation

In this section, document the BCP De-Activation Trigger for each Key Business Process; what would need to happen in order to stop following the BCP plan and go back to conducting business like you did before the emergency (Ex. Utilities at primary work location have been restored).

Be sure to document who is responsible for deactivating the BCP and initiating the restoration plan. Also be sure to document the affected Contact Tree (i.e. who needs to be informed of the deactivation of the BCP and initiation of the restoration).

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20. Return To Normal Operations

In this section, define the tasks needed to move from operating under the BCP plan to restoring normal operations. For each task, document who is assigned the responsibility for completing the task.

BCP Plan Testing

To ensure that a BCP plan will be effective in the event of an emergency, it is important to test it out. Just like a fire drill tests out how good your plan is for evacuating the area in an emergency and how well people are trained and prepared to respond to an evacuation, you need to know how well your BCP plan is set up and how well people can follow it. Testing will identify any areas that need attention or revising.

The degree to which the testing is conducted is based on what you feel is appropriate. Obviously you will not set your office on fire to test the BCP, but many organizations do conduct emergency backup testing of computer systems (disaster recovery testing to demonstrate that the system can be brought up at the backup site and it is still accessible and still works and provides the data needed to operate the business).

Other tests include simulations to varying degrees. Some examples are having everyone work remotely for one day to verify how well the networks and systems operate and note any problems. Or do some laboratory testing or manufacturing at the back up site to verify how well and how quickly and how productive the backup plan works.

The objectives of this section are:

- □ To demonstrate that the plan does work.
- □ To provide people an opportunity to be trained in the BCP so they ready for a real emergency.
- □ To identify any problems, issues or areas of improvement that need to be addressed in the plan.

As a result of testing you may find out that the back server needs more disk space, or the data backups need to happen more frequently or people working remotely may not be able to access necessary systems because of firewall issues, or your backup manufacturing site does not have a loading dock so all you materials needs to be carted using fork trucks. The only way to realize these potential problems is through testing.

Make you sure you at least test the contact tree on a regular basis. You should be able to contact all the people in the tree and get confirmation back. Note how long this takes and any difficulties you encounter. These need to be addressed as one of the most basic and fundamental failures in a BCP plan is not being

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able to get in touch with everyone involved. If people have important roles that are critical, you might need to get them a better cell phone or faster internet service so you can communicate with them in an emergency. During the Y2K planning, key individuals in the company I worked for were given satellite phones in the event that the cell phone network went down. You need to decide what is appropriate.

Testing should be performed on a regular basis which you must determine based on what you think is appropriate. Some organizations perform yearly testing, or partial testing one year and full testing the next. When significant changes happen (you use a new back up site for your servers or take on a new manufacturing process) you would probably want to test the BCP to ensure these work as you intend.

Ideally, the test should be documented in a report which is attached to the BCP plan to document what was done, what the results were and any follow up actions that need to be taken to ensure effectivity of the BCP plan.

BCP Plan Maintenance

It is important to keep a BCP plan current and up to date in order for it to be useful when you really need it. This means that the plan must be reviewed and information updated on a regular or as-needed basis. This can either be done every year or every 6 months as it makes sense, or it can be every time there is a change that impacts on the information contained in the BCP plan.

The review should look at all the critical processes and make sure none are missing or have changed significantly such that the BCP plan no longer is adequate or accurate. You also need to carefully review contact trees to make sure the right people are in the right places in the tree. And you need to ask people to confirm that their contact information is still correct.

When the plan is reviewed, indicate the date the plan was reviewed and what changes, if any, were made. If the plan is reviewed on a regular time basis, then it is possible that the review will find that all of the information is current and correct and thus no changes are necessary. It is still important to indicate the date and completion of this review to specify that the plan is still current.

Top Reasons Why BCPs Fail and How To Make Sure Yours Does Not

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is a valuable tool for being prepared in the event of an unforeseen disaster which impacts your business. Most organizations will readily agree with this fact that a BCP is needed. However there is great disagreement within organizations when the question arises “how much planning is enough?”. A BCP is a great hedge against unforeseen business interruptions, but it does come at a cost. Creating, revising and testing a BCP costs both time and money; time of employees spent writing and testing the plan, plus money spent on contracts with backup vendors and consultants. This is when management begins to question the value of BCP and decisions need to be made to balance the scope of contingency planning against the cost. At what point are you spending too much for the value you are receiving?

Part of this question is answered in the risk assessment and business impact analyses phase of the BCP creation. If created appropriately, items identified to be of sufficient risk to the business need require contingency planning. The scope (and cost) of contingency planning should be proportional to the risk. For example, an informational website may not require the same level of redundancy and recovery time objectives as an order-tracking system. This is evaluated by the business and supported by results of testing the BCP.

But beyond this, how do you know if the BCP is appropriate? Is there more you can do...without doing too much? An excellent way to gain insight into the robustness of your particular BCP is to look at the most common types of BCP failures; situations where the BCP did not ensure the business recovery time objectives. Take a look at these common reasons why BCPs fail to meet objectives and then carefully evaluate your BCP against these areas.

So what are the most common reasons why BCPs do not live up to expectations?

1. The reasons for implementing the BCP are not supported at the top.

I have been involved in organizations where BCPs were being implemented because either it sounded like the right thing to do or someone thought it was a good idea because the auditors were rescheduled to show up soon. The problem was that senior management wasn't really on board with this idea and therefore no one beneath them really believed this was worth spending the time or money on. The result of this is a great looking set of documentation with very little behind it. Example: BCP says “if the site is inaccessible, all employees work from home and we go to a contact manufacturing site.” This sounds great but is this feasible? If there is no IT infrastructure in place to enable everyone to work

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from home, and management is not willing to negotiate a contract for contingency services with contract manufacturers, because both of these items have a cost, then the plan is doomed to fail if you really needed it.

2. BCP does not look at the entire business.

Many organizations confuse Disaster Recovery Planning (DRP) with Business Continuity Planning (BCP). DRP focuses on IT systems while BCP focuses on the entire business and organization. It is great to be able to recover the IT systems, but if people are not available to use them nor manufacture products nor deliver them to customers, then the plan is not complete.

3. Owner of the BCP is not clearly identified.

In order for the plan to be successful, there must be an owner who has the responsibility of managing the BCP. The owner must also have sufficient authority to make business decisions for allocating resources to BCP related tasks, evaluating risks, and authorizing spending for BCP. Hands-on tasks such as documentation may be delegated to others but the owner has the responsibility to make sure the plan is maintained, up-to-date, and tested. In many organizations, the owner is someone (or worse, several people) in senior management whose objective is "Just get it done! And don't bother me with the details" and then they delegate all the responsibilities of managing the plan to other folks who do not have the authority to implement the plan nor approve the associated expense. The result is similar to item #1 where you end up with a great looking set of documentation with no value behind it. Sometimes, the owner is an IT person and then we get into the issues described in item #2 where the plan is heavily focused on DRP rather than looking at the entire business.

4. Inadequate BCP training

It is critical that all members of an organization are familiar with and have been trained on their role(s) within the BCP. Just reading the documents may not be enough. Some roles may require using different systems or accessing information from alternative sources or being familiar with alternate locations. You need to be sure that in the event of a real emergency, there is no confusion about what to do. Also with all the changes going on in businesses all the time, it is very important to train new people on BCP. This is an ongoing process that must be kept on the front burner at all times.

5. Inadequate BCP testing.

The effectiveness of the BCP is dependent on the level and frequency testing. It is not different than fire drills or emergency evacuation drills; you need to be familiar with the process and the best way to do this is to practice a simulated disaster drill. Organizations which do not fully embrace the concept of BCP

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typically do the minimum of testing to keep costs down and not take people away from doing “real work”. The result is that during a real emergency, you may find yourself in a situation which was not anticipated and as a result, precious time now needs to be spent figuring out how to resolve issues rather than executing the solutions. Pay now or pay later; the more testing is done up front, the better prepared you will be.

6. Documentation is out of date.

BCP documents are living documents which take time to put together and time to review for accuracy. This time needs to be invested at regular intervals to ensure the documents still have correct information. If the BCP is written, signed and filed away never to be looked at again until there is a disaster 5 years later, chances are that some if not most of the information is out of date. Organization trees, phone numbers, addresses, suppliers, customers, account IDs, passwords all change all the time. It is critical that as part of BCP, there is an allowance for time to be spent on a periodic review of the BCP to ensure it is current. This can be annual, quarterly; whatever your organization determines to be appropriate but it must be done or the value of the plan quickly decreases over time.

7. Inadequate time spent in the planning and evaluating of the BCP strategy.

To create a truly optimized and value-added BCP requires time and effort to analyze and evaluate information from many sources. This is not something one person working by themselves can just zip out to get it checked off the list. Even a large team of expert consultants cannot do this overnight by themselves. They must follow a careful process of interviewing all the key information holders in the organization to ensure all the critical factors are considered before making any recommendations for an effective BCP. These factors include the critical business process, risk factors, impact analyses, recovery time objectives, costs, logistics, and people issues (not necessarily in that order). If any of these factors are skipped over or information is just assumed, then there is a real risk that the plan may not be adequate or it may cost more to implement than is really needed. Neither outcome is acceptable.

8. Inadequate assignments of responsibility.

One of the key success factors to an effective BCP is to assign and distribute responsibilities appropriately. If all critical responsibilities are assigned to one person, then the system will quickly get overloaded and the process will slow down, or worse some tasks will fail. If no one is clear who is responsible, then there will be conflicting and unclear direction or no one will be addressing key issues. There needs to be clear BCP leadership at a top level and then a logical distribution of responsibility at the tactical level. One key item to consider is where there are multiple locations involved; does it make sense to have the BCP structured by function even though the functions cross different locations? Or by

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site so that there is a local person available to provide direction as it is needed? Also for every assignment of responsibility, there needs to be a primary person and a backup assigned. This ensure coverage of this area in the event the primary person in unable to perform this function.

Having this knowledge provides very valuable insights to enable the creation of a robust yet cost-effective BCP.

More Tips, Tools And Information

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