

Business Continuity In The Face of Disaster

When disaster threatens, a business owner is faced with one question above many, “Should our doors remain open or should we temporarily close?” The question is most easily answered by whether or not your business has prepared for an emergency in advance.

Disasters can strike at any time. Fires, hurricanes, floods, acts of terrorism or utility outages could cause a business to relocate, cease operation temporarily or even close its doors indefinitely.

According to research firm IDC, approximately 60% of small businesses fail to back up data regularly and as much as 80% of all backups have a portion of data that is not restorable. For business owners, backing up data is a top priority when the loss of important files and information could debilitate operations for months, even years. In fact, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 43% of businesses that close following a natural disaster never reopen.

Hardware and software can be replaced; the real risk to your business is interrupted access — even momentarily — to critical data. How prepared you are to face these challenges before a disaster strikes can determine the fate of your business.

Houston e-Retailer Shines Through Hurricane

For Brian Gavin, VP of Whiteflash.com an upscale diamond e-retailer based in Houston- the decision to “stay or go” was simple:

“We couldn’t afford to close the business,” Brian says. “As an e-retailer, our business isn’t confined to the Gulf Coast. We have orders and inquiries coming in from every corner of the globe, 24 hours a day.” So Brian designated all personnel to safer locations and maintained normal business activities remotely.

Brian, a customer of ours, has grown accustomed to depending on our IsUtility® system, a fully-managed virtual IT solution. With it, Whiteflash.com’s interoffice communication and collaboration between sales and management went as smoothly as when all departments sat under one roof.

“I’ve been in this industry for over 30 years, and if you’re not available to process an order or respond to inquiry, someone else will be. As an e-retailer, I can’t wait weeks or months to retrieve hard data if something should happen to my system,” Brian clarifies. “Loss of data could put me out of business. Even a day’s worth of lost productivity can set us back. Throughout Rita, my workforce worked under one virtual roof without missing a beat.”

Take a moment to consider what this could mean for your business. What if all of your important data were lost in an instant? How long would it take you to get your business up and running again?

If you’re responsible for your IT system (not an outsourced IT solution), an emergency preparedness plan is the only way your business can survive the fury of what may happen this hurricane season.

For any business interruption every minute of downtime - planned or unplanned - costs a business more than just thousands of dollars. It can also cost you the confidence of those who depend on that business - customers, suppliers and business partners. Key components of an emergency preparedness plan should include:

1. Records. First, determine the critical components of your business. Keep detailed notes on everything you do and what you rely on, such as data, electricity, phones, the Internet. Then make contingency plans for every aspect.

2. Business Information. If you can access your data, you can restart your business faster, especially if you have to work from another location. In a disaster, you’ll receive insurance or federal funds much more quickly if you have your records. Your data should be stored in a secure central location so that your employees can operate no matter where they’re located. This allows you to keep track of employee activities, retain customers

and receive quicker assistance.

3. Backup Data Files. Although backups should be part of regular procedures, a separate full backup of your critical data should be performed before your business closes in response to a hurricane threat. It is crucial at this time that a copy of this backup be moved to a secure location an appropriate distance away in order to avoid the possibility that a hurricane would affect both locations. The difference between a backup and a “good” backup can save your business, so *be sure to test your backups for verification.*

4. Computer Storage. As a last step, your computer should be shut down properly and unplugged from the wall outlet. Do the same for the monitor and all peripherals such as printers, scanners and speakers. Move the computer and peripherals away from windows and doors towards the center of the room. The equipment should be supported securely at least two feet from the floor and covered with plastic sheeting.

5. Power. For each vital piece of business equipment, purchase auxiliary generators. For data, you can purchase inexpensive backup power supplies to give you about a half hour of extra power for computers.

6. Safety. In a disaster, the most important thing is physical safety. Keep flashlights and fresh batteries on hand. Develop evacuation plans; know how to exit your building in the dark or in a fire. Keep a supply of fresh water in case you have to stay in your office or store for hours. Get names and numbers from every employee of whom to contact.

7. Alternative suppliers. Remember, a disaster elsewhere can be a disaster for you if your critical vendors become unavailable. Develop a list of suppliers in other parts of the country – or world – for back up.

Xvand Technology is provider of IsUtility® (www.isutility.com.) delivering a fully-managed virtual IT department on-demand as a utility.