

Business Continuity Management

An Introduction and Overview

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"I can't imagine any business moving forward without a plan. If businesses are up and running, individuals can receive a paycheck and the community can stabilize. If businesses are able to recover, the local economy is able to come back. It's so critical."

Bill Munro, Owner, Munro Inc., whose entire community was evacuated and severely impacted by Hurricane Rita in 2005.

What is Business Continuity Management?

Business Continuity Management (BCM) is a management process that provides a framework to increase the resiliency of a business or other organization. It is used to ensure that essential functions can continue during and after a disaster, emergency, or other event that can negatively impact business. Through the implementation of BCM, an organization can identify potential impacts that might threaten productivity, and prepare for and execute an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, as well as its reputation and viability in the marketplace and community.

Why is it important?

Every year, businesses and organizations are badly damaged or even forced to close because of unforeseen events. All types of organizations, large and small, that do not implement any level of BCM planning are at risk for serious loss of productivity and profit.

Some of the events that may seriously affect an organization that are often not considered or addressed in advance include:

- Information technology (IT) viruses and equipment failures
- Utility interruptions
- Breaks in supply chains
- Accidents and fires
- Flu pandemic / staff illness and injury
- Natural hazards and disasters
- Theft, vandalism, and other crimes
- Terrorism

When considering issues beyond the day-to-day concerns of running an organization, it becomes clear that the risk exposure can be enormous. Therefore, it is essential that leaders of businesses and organizations proactively prepare for emergencies and disasters, as it is not a matter of *if* a disaster will occur, but *when*.

What are the benefits of BCM?

Through BCM implementation, your organization will:

- **Have a Plan of Action** for handling disruptions that is shared with employees and practiced through exercises
- **Minimize Impact to Essential Operations**, increasing your ability to continue to operate
- **Protect Data and Information** to ensure business stability and customer service
- **Increase Reliability** by proving your ability to mitigate all-hazard conditions
- **Protect Market Share and Minimize Financial Losses** by proactively planning and accounting for recovery resources before they are needed
- **Gain Industry Recognition** by promoting preparedness with suppliers and clients alike

How does my organization begin the process?

The first issues to consider when developing a Business Continuity Plan are:

Team Members and Partners

Strategic partners are necessary in the event of a disaster. These partners may include vendors, customers, neighbors, or emergency services organizations. In a larger company, team members will be recruited mostly from within the organization

Communication

Establishing how leaders will communicate with team members in an emergency is critically important. Remember to include procedures for contacting customers and stake holders

Temporary Production and Distribution

Consider how the business will keep goods and services flowing in a disaster. Sample solutions include storing some critical components and supplies off site, or arranging for distributors to drop-ship directly to customers. Think this one through before a fire or tornado destroys part of your facility.

Data Protection and Backup

Routine data backup is absolutely critical for any organization. It may be as simple as syncing data to an external hard drive or backing up larger systems to off-site servers. Robust antivirus software and a firewall are also essential for protecting data.

Backup Power

Ice storms, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other hazards can cause long-term power outages. Consider how long your business could survive without power and determine if a backup generator will be necessary. At a minimum, consider installing an uninterruptable power supply (UPS) on computers to allow them to be safely powered down when an outage occurs.

Where can I learn more?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides very good BCM information online, including their *Emergency Management Guide for Business & Industry*, at <http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm>.

FEMA also provides business readiness guidance on its *Ready* website: <http://www.ready.gov/business>.



The lifecycle of Business Continuity Management.

“We lost everything. But back-up systems were in place and our employees worked from other locations. And because we were ready, our customers never knew the difference.”

Jonathan Harlan, CEO, Aeneas Internet and Telephone, describing how the company’s plan worked after an F4 tornado demolished its home office in 2003.
