

Next Steps in Developing Effective BCP/DR Plans

In the first article of this series, we shared with you the basics of effective Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Planning (BCP/DR). We wanted to make this article more resourceful in terms of providing substantive information on how to develop an effective BCP/DR plan. However, we thought it would be beneficial to give you all a synopsis of the tasks that should be conducted when developing a BCP/DR plan, before we get into the details on how to bring one into being. In the next article, we will go into more elaborate detail on how to write an effective plan.

A good first step in developing a BCP/DR plan is to perform a business impact analysis (BIA). This will identify the company's most crucial systems and processes and the effect an outage would have on the business. The greater the potential impact, the more money a company should spend to restore a system or process quickly. For instance, a stock trading company may choose to pay for completely redundant IT systems that would allow it to immediately start processing trades at another location, while a manufacturing company may decide that it can wait 24 hours to resume shipping. A BIA will help a company set a restoration sequence to determine which parts of the business should be restored first. In our experience, many organizations do not conduct a BIA before developing their BCP/DR plan and their plans often end up being geared toward recovering less critical systems first. In addition to performing a BIA, we recommend clients complete a number of other tasks when building a BCP/DR. Examples include:

1. Document a succession plan for the executive leader, clearly defining who will call the shots in the event the CEO is no longer available.
2. Identify backup employees to support the key emergency personnel. Train backup employees to perform emergency tasks. The emergency personnel you count on to lead during an event will not always be available. Be at least two deep at each position if your organization has the resources.
3. Develop a detailed communication plan that includes how the organization, top executives, and employees will communicate with each other, its customers, and the outside world. Include an offsite crisis meeting place in the plan.
4. Invest in an alternate means of communication in case the phone/network goes down.
5. Document the local emergency groups' (firefighters, police, and EMTs) contact information in the plan. Try to form partnerships with the local emergency responders to establish a good working relationship. Familiarize them with your company and site.
6. Conduct emergency drills and exercises. Make sure that all employees and executives are involved in the exercises so that they can practice responding to an emergency.
7. Evaluate your company's performance during each test, and work toward constant improvement. Continuity exercises should and most certainly will reveal weaknesses if done properly.
8. Test your continuity plan regularly to reveal and accommodate changes. Technology, personnel, and facilities are in a constant state of flux at any company. When the unexpected occurs—from unplanned downtime to a major disaster—the details and unplanned variables are what always impede a fast

recovery. It is important to test the way you recover, and recover the way you test. Practice and experience pays off in a time of crisis.

9. Store a copy of the organization's BCP/DR plan offsite so that it can be accessed should the main premises be destroyed.