



Contingency Planning for the Small Enterprise

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It is a year since the September 11 World Trade Center attack occurred and many business people learned first hand the importance of a workable Contingency Plan. I just happened to be one of the many people. My main consulting office was in a New York facility -- a few blocks from the World Trade Center. After the disaster, I assumed we would be able to operate without any difficulties even though we knew it would be weeks before we would be permitted back in the building. Was I surprised when I received a call saying "we have a small problem."

My small problem was just that and we were able to be operational within a few days. But had the problem been addressed earlier, the recovery process could have occurred much faster.

Other businesses were not as fortunate. Many of the small to mid-market businesses were struggling with how to get themselves back up; some I am sure never did. Large companies have a "special department" that deal with Contingency Planning. Smaller and mid-market organizations many times know they should do something, but never get around to it.

Regardless of your company's size, you might want to:

- **Perform an Impact Assessment.** Prepare a comprehensive list of potential incidents that could affect the normal operations. Each incident should be given a probability and severity level rating.
- **Document your contingency plan and procedures.** Use the impact assessment as a base, and then develop the plan and procedures. The plan needs to move your organization from a disrupted status to a normal state.
- **Determine what order the critical business functions need to be resumed.** Although the most important step in the plan is to deal with the immediate aftermath – get yourself up and running – you need to understand how long you can survive without a critical function as well as the cost for not having a function operational.

- **Consider all of your hardware and software.** Many times people just think about their data, but forget about servers, networks and even on-line data.
- **Document all of your system configurations.** Make sure that the plan has the current configuration.
- **Periodically test your back-up methods and sites**—take nothing for granted and don't take short cuts.
- **Train your personnel and make sure the planning effort is taken seriously.** Make sure everyone understands their related duties and responsibilities.
- **Maintain the plan.** When your procedures and systems change, update your plan and procedures.

Developing and maintaining a recovery plan can be a major effort. Each potential solution has trade-offs in terms of monetary cost, time to implement and cost to maintain. But, believe me, a plan is necessary if you ever have a disaster and you want to survive.

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