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4 | Guide to Disaster Recovery

wheelhouse IT / STORM RESPONSE

Introduction

Creating a comprehensive disaster recovery guide for a business involves several key components to ensure that all aspects of the organization are prepared for and can effectively respond to disruptions.

Here you will find a detailed guide that can be tailored for your business, and should be adapted to the specific needs and structure of your business.

Understanding Why Disaster Recovery Is Important

IT Disasters are costly. Did you know:

▶▶ FEMA reports that roughly 40 to 60 percent of small businesses never reopen their doors following a disaster.

▶▶ Damage from a disaster could linger for as long as two to three years.

▶▶ Some businesses may find themselves closing for days or even weeks, never recovering from the revenue lost when their doors were forced to close.

▶▶ Few businesses have the capacity to shut down for any length of time and still survive long-term.

▶▶ Many customers expect prompt delivery of products and services. If there is a delay, the business faces the risk that customers may seek out competitors.

▶▶ Organizations without a disaster recovery plan might lose business to competitors who can demonstrate they have an actionable plan already in place.

▶▶ Some disasters may overwhelm the resources of public agencies who may not be able to reach your business in a timely manner.

▶▶ News travels fast, so businesses need to be able to reach out to customers and stakeholders quickly to extinguish their concerns.

If you don't want your business to fall victim to one of these statistics, you'll need a solid disaster recovery plan in place before a disaster leaves your business paralyzed.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

The discussion of disaster recovery preparations can be one of those uncomfortable topics people tend to avoid. Either business leaders fail to plan at all, they underestimate the level of risk facing their business, or they are simply overconfident in their ability to recover and maintain operations following a disaster.

Here is a detailed guide tailored to businesses that can be used to brainstorm some areas in which your organization might be at risk.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

1. Risk Assessment and Business Impact Analysis

Objective:

Identify potential threats and the impact they could have on your business operations.

Actions:

- Conduct a thorough risk assessment to identify vulnerabilities related to natural disasters, cyber-attacks, hardware failure, and human error.
- Perform a business impact analysis to determine how these threats could affect different departments and processes.

In other words:

Look out for potential risks like floods, fires, or cyber-attacks that could disrupt operations. Assess how these risks could impact revenue, customer service, or production.

2. Disaster Recovery Strategy

Objective:

Develop strategies to minimize the impact of identified risks.

Actions:

- Designate critical and non-critical systems and processes.
- Establish recovery time objectives (RTO) and recovery point objectives (RPO) for each critical function.
- Choose appropriate disaster recovery sites (hot, cold, or warm sites).

In other words:

Identify critical systems like customer databases or email servers. Determine how quickly they need to be restored after a disaster and what backup options are available.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

3. Technology and Data Backup

Objective:

Ensure all important data and applications can be recovered after a disaster.

Actions:

- Implement regular backup schedules for all critical data.
- Use offsite storage and cloud solutions to store backups.
- Test backup systems regularly to ensure they work effectively.

In other words:

Regularly back up important files and data to an external hard drive or cloud storage. Check that backups are working properly and can be easily accessed if needed.

4. Disaster Recovery Team

Objective:

Assign responsibilities for disaster recovery to a dedicated team.

Actions:

- Create a disaster recovery team with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Include members from various departments such as IT, HR, finance, and operations.
- Train the team in disaster response and recovery procedures.

In other words:

Form a small team with specific roles like IT support, communication, and logistics. Make sure each team member knows what they need to do in an emergency.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

5. Communication Plan

Objective:

Maintain clear and effective communication during and after a disaster.

Actions:

- Develop a communication plan that includes contact information for all employees, key clients, suppliers, and emergency services.
- Set up an emergency notification system to quickly disseminate information.
- Prepare templates for emergency communications to stakeholders.

In other words:

Create a list of emergency contacts for employees, clients, and suppliers. Decide how you will communicate during a crisis, whether it's through email, phone calls, or a messaging app.

6. Supplier and Vendor Management

Objective:

Ensure that key suppliers and vendors can support recovery efforts.

Actions:

- Identify critical suppliers and vendors and integrate them into the disaster recovery plan.
- Establish service level agreements (SLAs) that include disaster recovery expectations.
- Maintain a list of alternative suppliers/vendors in case primary ones are unavailable.

In other words:

Identify key suppliers and vendors for essential products or services. Have backup options in case your primary suppliers are unable to deliver.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

7. Employee Training and Awareness

Objective:

Educate employees on their roles before, during, and after a disaster.

Actions:

- Conduct regular training sessions on disaster recovery procedures.
- Perform drills and simulations to prepare employees for different scenarios.
- Update training materials as procedures and technologies change.

In other words:

Train employees on basic safety procedures like evacuation routes and first aid. Teach them how to recognize and report security threats like phishing emails.

8. Legal and Compliance Considerations

Objective:

Ensure the disaster recovery plan meets all legal and regulatory requirements.

Actions:

- Review regulatory requirements related to data protection, business continuity, and industry-specific regulations.
- Incorporate compliance requirements into the disaster recovery plan.
- Regularly review and update the plan to ensure ongoing compliance.

In other words:

Stay updated on relevant laws and regulations for your industry. Make sure your disaster recovery plan complies with data protection laws and industry standards.

Disaster Recovery Guide for Businesses

9. Testing and Maintenance

Objective:

Regularly test the disaster recovery plan to ensure its effectiveness.

Actions:

- Schedule regular tests of the disaster recovery procedures (e.g., annually or biannually).
- Update the plan based on test results and changes in the business environment.
- Review and revise the plan after any major business changes or new threats.

In other words:

Test your disaster recovery plan regularly to make sure it works. Practice simulated disasters or IT outages to see how well your team responds.

10. Documentation and Accessibility

Objective:

Maintain detailed documentation of the disaster recovery plan.

Actions:

- Document all aspects of the disaster recovery plan and procedures.
- Ensure that copies of the disaster recovery plan are stored in secure, accessible locations.
- Make the disaster recovery plan accessible to all relevant stakeholders.

In other words:

Keep important documents like your disaster recovery plan in a secure location. Make sure key employees know where to find them in an emergency.

Conclusion

A well-crafted disaster recovery plan is crucial for minimizing the impact of disruptions and ensuring the continuity of business operations. Regular updates and training are key to keeping the plan effective as the business and technological landscapes evolve.

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