

Making it through

Do you have a business continuity plan in place to survive the next disruption?

INTERVIEWED BY SUE OSTROWSKI

Congratulations. Your company has found a way to mitigate the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic and you are still in business. But are you prepared to survive the next disruption?

“It’s critical to have a business continuity plan in place that will detail the processes and procedures to keep a company operating — or restore operations — whatever the disruption may be, from a physical disaster like something weather-related, a cyberattack, or another pandemic,” says Eric Thal, managed services manager at Blue Technologies.

Smart Business spoke with Thal about how a business continuity plan can help ensure your company is able to tackle the next disruption, no matter what occurs.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR EVERY COMPANY TO HAVE A BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN?

Companies that don’t have a plan run the risk of being unable to continue servicing or selling to their clients. Having a plan in place to quickly recover directly impacts both an organization’s revenue and its reputation.

Businesses need to plan for every possible scenario because one plan isn’t going to address every disaster. The steps you take for surviving in a pandemic are not the same as you would take following a natural disaster. For example, during the pandemic, workers are working remotely. But what if there is no internet access? Consider as many factors as possible that could disrupt your business.

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WEBSITE: For more information on how to create a business continuity plan, visit www.bluetechologies.com.

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WHAT ARE THE STEPS FOR CREATING A BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN?

The first step is to classify the data within your organization. Involve people from every department and identify which users should have access to which data and why. Understand where that data is so that when an incident occurs, you know which employees are trying to access what data and that there is more than one path to get to that information.

Identify what the objectives and goals of the plan are and what the major areas of concern are. Then establish a preparedness team — stakeholders in the business who will be called on to act in a disaster. Also have back-ups in place in case those stakeholders are not available to ensure continuity of operations.

It’s difficult to plan for everything, but it’s worth trying. Do a risk assessment that includes everything you think could happen, and if it did, what the resulting action would be. Identify the essential functions of the business. What is the minimum you have to be able to do in order to continue operating? Once you have identified those functions, prepare a plan to deal with each of them.

Finally, review and test the plan. Just having a plan doesn’t mean anything if

you haven’t run through the scenarios to make sure it actually works. Don’t just check the box that you have a plan in place.

HOW CAN AN OUTSIDE CONSULTANT HELP A BUSINESS ENSURE IT’S COVERING ALL OF THE BASES?

Consultants have worked with hundreds, if not thousands of businesses, and know what works and what doesn’t. That person can help a business leverage best practices in its industry by sharing information about what other businesses are doing. It’s not a question of if a business faces a disruption, but when. And when that next disruption occurs, it’s critical that you not only have a plan in place but have one that has been tested and that you know will be effective.

No matter how big or small, every company needs to have a tested business continuity plan in place. Get people involved from every department, it’s not just an IT problem or an executive problem. Each business unit is uniquely affected by a disruption and it’s important to understand the full picture.

Having a plan wasn’t a priority for many businesses going into 2020, but it is going into 2021. You may think it’s not going to happen to you, but it’s only a matter of when. ●