

PLAN FOR THE WORST

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How much do you, or rather how much does your business rely on your computer?

Think about it a different way. Your computer suddenly becomes unusable. What would happen to your business?

Could your computer put you out of business?

I remember once turning on my computer one morning and was faced with the message "disk boot failure. Insert system disk". Not having made a system disk, I didn't quite know what to do. The problem could have been caused by a number of things, but to me seemed to suggest something had gone seriously wrong with my hard disk.

In the end it turned out that the night before, I'd unlocked my hard drive, which at the time was in a removable caddy, and not put it back properly. A simple turn of the key eventually put everything right and I was able to carry on, but if the solution had not been this simple, I could have lost everything that was on that hard drive. At the time, I had no backups and all my data was on one hard drive.

It's not just computer problems that can affect a business of course. There are other disasters such as fire or flooding. Is your business prepared for this kind of problem? Statistics show that 80% of businesses which suffer a major disaster and which don't have a recovery plan go into liquidation within 18 months, so do you have a plan that will avoid your business becoming part of those statistics?

Planning for a crisis need not be complicated. It can start by something as simple as checking your insurance. Then sit down and think up as many "what ifs" as you can. Write down what you would do and what, if anything, you can do to prepare in case such a situation does arise. For example, if your computer packed up completely, have you got your most important data backed up? Is this back up stored in a safe place i.e. if your office caught fire, destroying your computer, would you still have the backed up information?

Good management of a crisis can make all the difference to what happens to your business next. Advance planning helps you make the right decisions. This is true whatever size your business is

whether it be in an office of its own or in your back bedroom, whether you are working on your own or have staff in your office.

Do your staff know what to do in a crisis? Are there written down procedures for crisis handling? If you are working on your own, and something happens to you, does anyone else know enough about your business to carry on? You might consider writing a "handbook" to go with your business which describes everything you can think of that affects your business and how it is run.

If you do have a crisis to handle, you could, with a little thought, turn it into good publicity. If you anticipate quickly and act positively, it will not only help you contain the situation but may lead to improved public perception of your business e.g. by stressing the measures you are taking to attend to your customers despite the crisis.

Whatever the size of your business, even a little time thinking "what if" would be time well spent.

Neil Ogden has been running his own business in the UK for nearly ten years providing products and services for all sorts of businesses including web site design, copywriting, and business courses and publications. He has just launched a new online magazine Home Biz On Line that can be found at www.homebizonline.co.uk. His main company web site is www.neilogdenassociates.co.uk.