

To Your Success

I.T. DISASTER PLANNING & RECOVERY FOR THE SMALL BUSINESS

By Jim Pepitone, FarPoint Solutions, LLC

It used to be that only large companies had to worry about disaster planning and recovery for their computer systems. But today's small businesses use computers for almost everything from storing financial information to word processing. We all take for granted our access to information stored in our emails, applications and over the Internet. This has made computer networks and the information stored on them an essential part of any business.

Like large companies, small businesses need to have an IT disaster plan in place before something happens. Here are the basics:

The Plan – While most disaster planning and recovery starts and ends with a tape backup schedule, you really should have at least the following:

- An accurate up-to-date inventory of both hardware and software products with licensing, serial numbers, location and configuration information.
- Backup copies of the original software and all the upgrades on a CD. This will aid in the recovery process.
- The backup schedule and the monthly logs. The logs should contain the date, media type/number/name/location along with any errors that were encountered.
- Emergency contact information for key personnel, hardware/software vendors with a list of responsibilities.
- The most recent administrator log in and passwords for all software and operating systems.

As for backups, the amount and type of information that needs to be backed up can play a major part in deciding the type of backup solution that is needed. Using multiple backup methods and media will increase your chances of recovering information. Here are some options:



- **Tape Drives:** The staple of off-line backup solutions for as long as computer systems have existed. Newer technologies such as DLT and AIT offer the fastest and most trouble-free backup and restoration. Start with at least 21 tapes because this will give you four weeks of daily capacity and one extra tape.
- **CDRW/CDR:** CDRW/CDR can be a cost effective option when compared to tape drives. CDR (write once) media can be bought in bulk for well under 50 cents, while a tape can cost \$25 or more. CDW (write multiple) media runs at about \$10 each and offers the additional advantage of being able to be used multiple times.
- **Internet storage or FTP:** File Transfer Protocol storage is another option. Most Internet Service providers provide either 5MB or 10MB of

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Critical information for the protection of your small business including:

- *IT disaster planning*
- *Protecting your financial data*
- *PR crisis planning*
- *The importance of a force majeure clause for your business*
- *Maintaining steadfast client relationships*

The contributors to this newsletter are independent professionals providing general information. Business owners should consult an experienced professional for assistance suited to their particular needs.

STEADFAST AND TRUE

by Andrea Lafleur, Lafleur Graphics

Do your customers see you as steadfast and true? Are they aware that you are still out there and available when they need you? Most of us can list a number of businesses that seem to have existed since forever. That's because we've heard or seen their advertising campaigns repeatedly for years.

Many of the rules about advertising to gain new customers apply in your efforts to keep them. Continuous exposure gets you in the door and helps you stay there. You probably worked hard to establish your current customer base. Your first months in business were most likely spent on starting new relationships and cultivating deals or contracts. Now that you have those relationships in place, keep them! While you are depending on those customers to buy from you, at the same time they are depending on you to be available.

If you utilize the more expensive methods of advertising through radio, TV or billboards, do so on a regular basis, but it doesn't have to be often. After a while consumers will expect to see or hear your ad and will think you've disappeared if you stop advertising.

How about some inexpensive ways to stay in contact, especially when the economy takes a nasty turn and you find yourself chopping

budgets. A newsletter mailed regularly is a good idea, and it gives you the opportunity to keep your customers informed of company news. Newsletters can be any length and they can be designed as self-mailers. If you feel electronically adventurous, try e-mailing a condensed version of your newsletter. Electronic newsletters are increasing in popularity.

Another good through-the-mail advertising idea is the ever-economical postcard. A postcard is read even before the reader realizes it. While they were reviewing the postcard for its significance, you stole an opportunity to say "Hi, I'm still here and want an order." Even if they circular-filed the postcard, you didn't waste very much money and they saw your logo and advertising message anyway.

Ads or mailers are not the only tools available. Vary your reaching-out efforts by an actual visit from you. Once in a while surprise your customer with a small gift bearing your logo. When they order from you or sign a deal, thank them with a brief note. At the end of the year, send an imprinted holiday card to show your appreciation for their patronage.

Staying in touch with your customers will build their confidence in you and thus bring more business, all from being steadfast and true.

TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR FINANCIAL DATA

By Annabel Pedemonti, Accounting Software Services

ACCURACY

- Set closing date to avoid changing data in a closed period
- Verify the integrity of your data on a regular basis

SECURITY

- Set a password to access your financial data
- Change the password on a regular basis
- Do not choose a password with obvious associations to you
- Each user can have a separate password and individual access rights
- If the computer is at the reception desk, have a password accessed screensaver, so your data cannot be seen.

BACKUP

- Back up daily, or whenever you work on your bookkeeping
- Rotate your backup disks/zip disks/CDs, so consecutive backups are not on the same disk
- Keep backups off site
- Archive backups once your year-end is completed, and never use that disk again
- Zip disks or CDs are more reliable than floppy disks if you ever need to restore your data

CRISIS PLANNING: WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE REPORTERS ARE BANGING ON YOUR DOOR

By Andrea Obston, President, Andrea Obston Marketing Communications, LLC

An accounting firm “overlooks” some questionable practices on the part of its client. Another business lays off employees in the wake of a merger. A disgruntled ex-employee returns to the office with a gun and confronts his boss and co-workers. We’ve all heard of stories like these and have watched while company executives stumble through the barrage of media questions leaving the public shaking their heads and saying, “I’m not sure what, but they must be guilty of something.” But some companies are able to suffer a setback that makes them headline news and return to business as good, if not better, than before. (Can you say Tylenol?) How do they do it?

They plan for the worst, speak quickly and honestly, and talk to all their key audiences. Here are a few guidelines for developing an effective crisis plan:

- **Plan before you need to.** When a crisis hits, the public will judge the worth of your company by its response and they’ll do it quickly. In the “good old days” you had 24 hours before a story blossomed into a full-fledge crisis. Today, we have 30 minutes to get out in front of a story because many media outlets update their websites every half-hour. This means companies in crisis need to act quickly and deliver their side of the story. You do that by having an up-to-date crisis plan and having everyone buy into it before it’s needed.

- **Crisis-proof your company.** The first step in the plan is identifying as many potential sources of crises as possible. What are the implications if your product or service doesn’t deliver what it promises? Do you have a product or service that could be misused? Are you expanding or closing a facility? What harm could your company do to the environment under normal circumstances or if a safety system fails? Are you expecting a major layoff or consolidation of facilities? Do you plan to merge with or acquire another company? Make a list. Run it by your key executives, including your CEO, CIO, COO, legal team (in and outside), public relations people, product managers and some retirees who’ve been inside the company and now spend their days outside. Think outside the box. No one at McDonald’s expected their hot coffee to be characterized as a dangerous substance.

- **Build the team.** When a crisis hits, key individuals need to get together (face-to-face or



“...companies in crisis need to act quickly. You do that by having an up-to-date crisis plan...”

electronically) quickly. Don’t put anyone on the “SWAT” team who doesn’t have a working role. Of course, you include key high-level executives, lawyers, PR people and HR managers. But, what about the individual with the authority and staff to get information onto your website in a hurry? Make sure the people who make products or services work are also on that SWAT team. You’ll want to turn to them to find out what went wrong, why and how it can be fixed. Make sure you have a list of all team-members business, home and mobile numbers, e-mail addresses and numbers of the people who can track them down (like administrative assistants).

- **Identify a command center.** Where will the team meet? I’m not being dramatic when I say this is a key component of the plan. Make sure you have a private location with access to multiple phone lines, television, Internet, printers and fax machines. Staffing for the center (like administrative assistants) should also be decided before hand.

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THE PROTECTION OF A FORCE MAJEURE CLAUSE

By Attorney Judy Gedge



Force Majeure may sound like a delicacy at a Continental restaurant but it's not. It's defined in Black's Law Dictionary as irresistible or superior force. The important thing for you to know is that including a 'force majeure' clause in your contracts can provide you significant protection. Here's a typical example of this kind of provision:

"Company shall not be liable for any loss or delay resulting from any force majeure event, including Acts of God, fire, natural disaster, labor stoppage, war, terrorist acts, inability of carriers to make scheduled deliveries as a result of any of such events or any other cause which is not reasonably within Company's control. Furthermore, any delivery date shall be extended to the extent of any delay resulting from any such event."

No matter what sort of business you're in, whether you're a printer, a general contractor, a caterer or any other business owner, your ability to deliver your product or service can be impacted by a catastrophic event such as a fire,

flood or act of war. You may, for instance, be unable to obtain the component parts you need in order to manufacture and deliver the final product to your customer. This can be of particular concern if your suppliers are located overseas in areas which have become 'hot spots'. Or, your goods may be ready for shipment but a labor stoppage or other cause outside of your control may prevent timely delivery to your customer.

To minimize your liability for events outside your control you'll want to make sure your contracts contain a strong force majeure provision.

CRISIS PLANNING

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- **Include employees and other key audiences like board members.** A key component to your plan is the way you're going to inform these people. Don't wait for them to find it out as a news flash from the local television station. In a crisis, your employees can be the best PR ambassadors you have. But only if they are informed. Tell them as much as you can, as early as you can. Decide on the vehicles you'll use to inform those employees. Will it be mass e-mail, phone chain, small group meetings with managers who'll tell their people? Don't wait for the company newsletter. It's old news by then.

- **Write it down and keep it up.** Make sure that the plan is more than an academic exercise

resulting in a big fat binder that sits on a bookshelf. The plan needs buy-in among those who'll participate in it. It needs to be accessible to the right people. And, it should be reviewed frequently (at least every six months) and re-examined if the company goes through any major changes, like a change in ownership or leadership.

No one likes living through a crisis. But circling the wagons and pretending it will never happen is not the answer. Pre-planning your approach will enable your company to demonstrate its true character and get itself back to the business of doing business.

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storage that usually goes unused. Use encryption technology if you plan to use Internet storage for confidential information.

Make sure that the most current backup is stored off-site in a secure location. Store any other media in a fireproof chest or safe. Test your recovery procedure at least monthly and have at least one backup weekly that verifies or compares

your backup to the original. Keep your backup and recovery logs up-to-date and include copies of the logs in your plan.

The only way a company can survive a disaster is through effective planning and by working with a skilled information technology specialist who can help make sure your plan is complete.

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