

Business Continuity: Another Advantage of IP Telephony

You've put days, weeks, months and years of effort into setting up your business processes to make your business productive and profitable. You worry about the threat of competition, rising costs, regulations, slow economies and many other challenges that can impact your success.

Unfortunately, there's another worry you should add to your list that trumps all the rest -- acts of man and God. These include fires, floods, earthquakes, tornados, and even bombs, and any one of them can shut your business down in an instant.

Just as you build business plans, growth plans, marketing plans and more, it's critical that your business have a continuity plan. A continuity plan lays out the steps you will take now, and in the time of a disaster, to quickly get your business up and running again.

The FEMA www.ready.gov Website provides a guide for formulating this plan. It includes:

Step 1 -- Identify Hazards

These can include fire, explosion, natural disasters, hazardous materials spill or release, terrorism, workplace violence, pandemic disease, utility outage, mechanical breakdown, supplier failure and cyber attacks.

Step 2 -- Identify Assets at Risk

These hazards pose risk to people, property, supply chain, systems/equipment, information technology, business operations, business reputation, regulations or contractual obligations, and the environment.

Step 3 -- Identify the Impact of Disasters

The result of these hazards can be casualties, property damage, business interruption, loss of customers, financial loss, or environmental.

The next important step is to list the functions within your company that must be restored -- and in what order. Most businesses find that the first item on that list must be communications. Having the ability to communicate with customers, partners and vendors is vital to getting your business operational again. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states that a high-availability communication system design is the basis for disaster preparation and recovery.

Fortunately, if your business is using Internet protocol (IP) communications, including VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) or IP telephony, it is already in a position to restore its communications very quickly. VoIP telephone systems provide a number of advantages in times of disasters.

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In the article "IP Communications is Transforming Business Continuity Planning," on Continuity Insights, Michael Croy and Richard Zimmerman state, "IP communications technology supports a number of applications and features that enhance day-to-day business productivity. In the event of a business interruption, these same features also reduce the time frame for return to productivity." Here are some of the features they present that demonstrate why IP telephony is at the heart of business continuity:

- **Unified messaging** enables access to voice messages and faxes even if -- in the event of a power failure or severe storm, for example -- phone systems are down and the office is closed.
- **Integrated conferencing** (also called rich media communications) can be operated entirely within an organization's firewall and according to its corporate security policy. This reduces the security, compliance and privacy risks associated with audio, data and IM traffic hosted over the public network. The reduction of such threats helps reduce the risk of business interruption.
- **Extension mobility** allows users to log onto any networked telephone and be recognized by the system, so calls are automatically routed to the extension from which they are working, even if it is across the country from their normal work location, and even if it is a cell phone. This supports business continuity by enabling remote business communication in the event that facilities are closed or inaccessible.
- **Soft phones** go a step beyond, enabling employees -- especially revenue-producing contact center employees -- not only to plug their phones in anywhere with a dial tone, log in, and work from their 'normal' business extension, but also to access all the information the office phone system provided, including directory or customer information. With this information, they can conduct "business as usual" with customers and co-workers, even without an office.

Not being prepared for a business interruption, regardless of the cause, is the greatest barrier to getting your business up and running again quickly. It's important to have a written plan and the IP telephony systems and features that can shorten recovery time and reduce the financial loss that comes with an interruption of your business operation.



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