

Prepare for the Unexpected

The 'Unexpected' comes in many forms – fire, flood, theft, storm damage, computer failure as well as the more spectacular terrorist incidents. We all know that these things happen – we read about them and see them on the news every week.

Could your business cope if the unexpected were to happen to you ? If you have not produced at least a basic contingency or business continuity plan then statistics show that long-term survival of your business after a major incident is unlikely. You may be able to resume trading after a period of interruption, but lost turnover, stock and customer confidence progressively take their toll.

For larger businesses producing a workable business continuity plan can be a major undertaking. For small/medium sized businesses however the task is less daunting and expensive. There are a range of 'common-sense' actions and plans which can be put in place to minimise the impact of the unexpected such as :

- Taking regular computer back-ups of data AND software and storing them securely off-site
- Keeping contact lists of customers, suppliers and staff off-site
- Identifying your business' critical activities and working out in advance what you would need to resume these as quickly as possible and where you would get these items from
- Regularly reviewing your insurance policies
- Keep spare copies of keys to the office and any fire-safes off site
- Talking to your suppliers to ensure that they can provide emergency supplies of computer hardware, stationery, raw materials etc

These are just a few of the key elements of a business continuity plan – does your company do all of these at the moment ? If not, now is the time to act.

There are various sources of help and information available to enable you to produce a business continuity plan. These range from websites such as www.plan-it-control-it.com which provides low-cost templates for producing plans, to bodies such as the Business Continuity Institute (www.thebci.org) and specialist consultants who can assist in producing effective plans.

Like most business activities, forward planning can prevent costly and time-consuming mistakes when the pressure is on. A well thought out written business continuity plan - held and understood by the key management of your business - will help ensure that if the unexpected happens you have a fighting chance of surviving it.