

Business Continuity Plans and COVID-19: How to Prepare



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As of today, the World Health Organization confirmed the total number of global COVID-19, or coronavirus, cases surpassed 110,000.

Estimates as to when the outbreak will subside are fuzzy at best, and a vaccine is likely months off. Meanwhile, the economic toll continues to mount. Whether it's canceled business travel, disrupted supply chains, or social distancing, the situation is forcing organizations of every size and description to dust off their emergency response and business continuity playbooks.

Besides encouraging employees to work from home and stocking up on office hand sanitizer, what is an executive to do? In this post, we take a look at some sound tactics that will help keep your people safe and your doors open.

Business Continuity Planning: A Refresher

Business continuity refers to maintaining business functions or quickly resuming them in the event of a major disruption. A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is a plan-of-action a company puts in place that can be relied upon in the event of an emergency, when tension and stakes run high. It outlines the policies, procedures, and instructions an organization must follow in the face of such disasters, covering items such as business processes, assets, human resources, business partners, and more. While the final product will be different for every company, a typical BCP might include evacuation plans, communication protocols, contact lists, key asset inventories, and anything else that would be important for employees in a crisis.

Key Things to Remember

1. Put People First

The health and well-being of your employees is your top concern. It's possible that COVID-19 will sicken some employees and force others into quarantine.

Address their immediate needs first, and then begin to think about operations with a remote workforce. It is critical to establish a strategy that enables employees to continue to function without endangering them. You'll want to verify that you have the tools, technology, capacity, and security measures in place to support a large remote workforce. It may also be necessary to offer greater flexibility to normal working expectations.

2. Assemble Your Tiger Team

A BCP is only as effective as the people who put it into action. Thus it's critically important to be specific about who will be directly involved, from the plan's owner to those it affects. Getting these people on board during the planning stages can help with creating a stronger, clearer plan and a consistent message. Appoint at least one Point Person or selected team members to devise a response strategy and coordinate pandemic readiness activities. It may also be necessary to identify backup personnel.

A note of caution: while others may be involved in the plan's execution, it's imperative that the most senior leadership is involved—and *seen* as involved—in the company's decision-making. This will help to quell any fear and misinformation that can arise in such scenarios.

3. Communicate

When faced with a catastrophe, people want clear, straightforward steps that they can follow and know they've covered their bases. It's best to leave as little to interpretation as possible, and considering diverse perspectives will help make the plan as detailed and clear as needs warrant. Create a communications plan that includes providing employees and customers with regular situation updates as well as actions taken. Take care to ground your communications in verifiable news sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO).

4. Review Existing Plans

Before taking any action, pause to review your existing Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans. If they're sufficiently thorough, they should address a variety of contingencies that could disrupt the firm's businesses, including potential pandemics. It's likely that a playbook for viral outbreak scenarios is already in place, but it should be sufficiently flexible and reflect the firm's size, complexity, and business activities. It will ensure the firm's process and controls are identified and followed during a pandemic event.

5. Prioritize Key Business Functions

Next you'll want to assess your business processes, determine which areas are vulnerable, map dependencies, and estimate the potential losses if those processes go down for a given amount of time—from hours to weeks or more. You can start by identifying the critical products and services your company delivers and the customers or clients they are delivered to. This will help with prioritizing those parts of the BCP that pertain to the business's most high-value assets, functions, and relationships. Understanding the financial impact of down time due to COVID-19.

LogicGate Can Help You Start the Planning Process

At LogicGate, we believe a little preemptive planning can go a long way. Business Continuity Plans not only help protect core assets in the event of an outbreak, they also preserve peace of mind for business owners and employees. Although no BCP can guarantee full resumption of business operations, creating a sound framework for responding to crises can help your team handle a significant disruption to business operations.

LogicGate's Business Continuity Management solution can help ease the burden of putting a disaster-response plan in place, so you're ready to respond quickly and effectively. The powerful platform offers one central system where you can develop and store your response plan, keep key personnel up-to-date, and equip your employees with the information they need to keep your business intact.