Business Continuity: Business as usual. No matter what.
Five steps every business should take to prepare for a business interruption.

When people think of disasters, they generally envision hurricanes, tornados or floods - catastrophic events that devastate communities. But for a business, a disaster can be something as small as a failed switch or computer virus. These seemingly minor events can have a shocking impact on a business, often bringing operations to a standstill.

"The impacts of an interruption can be stunning," says Bob Boyd, President and CEO of Agility Recovery Solutions, the industry leader in mobile business continuity solutions for small to mid-sized businesses. "Statistics indicate that about 60 percent of the businesses affected by a disaster will not survive because they do not have a recovery plan in place."

Creating a basic, executable business continuity plan is one of the most important steps you can take to protect your organization and assure business as usual – no matter what the scenario. Below are five key steps to help you get started.

1. Assess your critical business functions.
Evaluate and document how your company functions and determine which processes, employees, equipment and materials are critical for your daily operations. Critical business functions include such things as billing, payroll and service fulfillment. List these functions and determine a process for restoring them in the event of an interruption.

2. Plan for an alternate location.
What would you do if your building were inaccessible tomorrow? Where would you go to continue basic business operations? Review your site requirements and determine a plan for recovery. Alternate site options include your home, a branch or second location, the site of a similar business, or a vendor that provides mobile recovery.

3. Back up your data and plan to restore your technology.
In today's highly technical economy, information is more valuable than ever. Having an automated, daily back-up system for important data is crucial. Make sure to store your data in an offsite, safe and secure location, preferably 50 miles or more from your site. Regularly verify that you are able to retrieve your data. Outline a plan to replace PCs, software, servers, printers and fax machines should your office be destroyed.

4. Create an employee, vendor and key client communication plan.
Create a 24-hour phone tree for all employees and their spouses or closest relatives. Make sure your employees know ahead of time how to exchange or obtain information should standard lines of communication fail. Also, compile a list of your critical clients and vendors and store it in an offsite location. Determine a process for contacting them should your systems go down.

5. Take a look at your insurance coverage.
Is your insurance coverage adequate? Sit down with your agent to assure that you are insured for potential risks. Consider business interruption insurance, which may compensate you for lost income should you experience a disaster. Make sure you keep photos of your building, equipment lists and policy information stored in a safe and secure offsite location.

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"Over the years, we have successfully recovered hundreds of businesses who've taken the time to prepare," says Boyd. "And we've also seen businesses with no plan in place that are powerless to resume operations. There is no worse feeling for a business person and no worse fate. The ability for your business to survive depends on preparations made today."