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Five Steps You Can Take Today to Prepare for the Next Disruption

In business—as in life—the one thing that everyone can expect is the unexpected. For businesses trying to prepare for the next disruption, the real challenge is how to prepare for an event that could be anything from a fire to a market crash to a public health crisis.

But planning for disruption is still possible, even when it is unclear what that disruption might be.

Below are five steps you can undertake right now to position your company for future disruption.

1 **Talk to your employees:** Disruption affects everyone from the top to the bottom. No matter the size of your business, it is vital to include employees from every role and function in your continuity planning process. Start by taking a survey of employees. Some questions to consider:

- What systems do you depend on every day? Do you use legacy systems such as fax machines or file storage that do not have an automatic back-up?

- Does someone else know how to do your job? Is there another person in the office who can take over if you are not available?

- Do you have what you need to work remotely? Internet access, home office equipment, company laptop, etc.?

- Are you willing to be a point of contact or liaison for your department? Are you willing to serve on a business continuity planning advisory board?

2 **Evaluate your equipment needs:** The middle of a disruption is not the moment to deal with obsolete, inadequate, or broken equipment. What do your employees need to keep working through disruption?

- What kind of gear or supplies are necessary (beyond those required by law or regulation) to handle the most likely physical disruptions? Do we have what we need to handle a physical disruption that takes place when people are in the office?

- Do employees who may need to work remotely at a moment's notice have company laptops and phones? Do they have Internet access at home? Do you have a secure way for these employees to connect to your cloud systems?

- If you are still transitioning systems to cloud, do you have a way to compensate for those systems that have not transitioned yet? Do employees who depend on those systems know how to meet their needs in an emergency?

3 **Secure your network:** In order to continue operating through disruption, it is almost a guarantee that some employees will have to work remotely or from another company location. Prepare ahead of time by ensuring that your network is secure and that you have the kind of resiliency to allow employees at all locations to keep working.

- Do you have a VPN client that remote workers can use to access your network?

- Is your malware protection up to date? Do you have intrusion protection?

- Do you have the kind of redundancy that guarantees continued operation in the event of an emergency?

4 **Prioritize moving to cloud:** Of course, moving to a new technology model is not something to be undertaken lightly or rushed, but cloud solutions offer better resiliency and continuity during business disruption. Take stock of your current systems and begin the process of transitioning to cloud. Consider all your systems:

- File storage

- Communications

- Apps

- Internal messaging and chat

- Customer relationship management

... and others

For those legacy systems that may not be easily transferred to a cloud solution, consider how to move away from that system, or find a way to provide a backup in the event of disruption.

5 **Formalize your plan:** Talking through business continuity plans is only the first step. Beyond surveys and conversations, it is vital to give the plan structure.

- **Write it down:** Your continuity plan should exist in writing somewhere. It does not have to be long or complicated, but it should be written down. If you have multiple sites, the plan should be adapted for each site. Each department may also have specific plans for certain events, and those plans can exist as written addenda.

- **Run through scenarios:** Each business location should regularly practice how to handle a physical disruption, which means running through a building evacuation process every so often. But it is also important to practice non-emergency events or disruptions where no one is able to get to the office. Be sure that every function and role knows how to continue or restore operations in any scenario.

- **Revisit plans on a regular schedule:** Some companies may need to practice every quarter—others may only need a yearly check-up. Whatever makes sense for your company, it is important to periodically read through your written plan and make necessary updates.

Planning for business disruption can seem overwhelming when it is impossible to know what the next disruption will be. However, spending the time to carefully consider the most likely scenarios will position most businesses to weather the next event and thrive on the other side

Allstream® can help position your company to survive the next unexpected event. To learn more about how Unified Communications (UC) Cloud Voice solutions can keep you working through disruption, contact us.

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