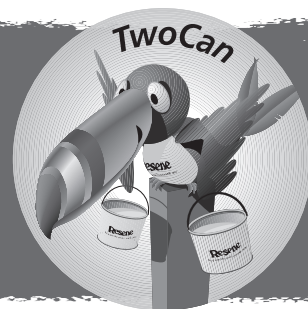


“ Customers and continuity – if there is anything that will break a business, it’s these two. You can’t have a successful business without either. There’s nothing that can guarantee you absolute success for either, but if you have a good plan B in place it will help you get over any speed bumps that may come your way. And if you strive for customer service excellence, even if you might fail now and again, it will help you grow a group of customers who not only want to hire you for future jobs but they will also happily tell others about how good your service is... ”



Have you got a Plan B?

A business continuity plan (BCP) pinpoints the most important parts of your business, identifies potential risks to these critical pieces and prepares you to recover as quick and easy as possible. Contingency planning is a crucial part of continuity planning – it means having a backup if your original plan no longer works. It’s your plan B.

Your BCP shouldn’t be limited to what to do after a natural disaster. It should cover any risks or threats that could disrupt your most important business activities.

A **continuity plan is different from emergency planning**. Emergency plans cover in-the-moment procedures in a crisis, eg a natural disaster. BCP covers how you’ll get core parts of your business up and running again.

Why you need to plan

Business owners aren’t legally required to do business continuity planning (BCP) but there are many reasons to put time and energy into it. Many small businesses struggle to reopen after a disaster. Planning greatly improves the likelihood that your business will survive – so it should be on your must-do list.

Other reasons to do BCP:

- It’s a plus for potential buyers and investors – it shows you’ve thought about other scenarios than simply business-as-usual. It gives your staff confidence, especially if you get them involved in planning.
- It helps you spot good opportunities for your business now, eg outsourcing payroll.
- It could help you negotiate lower insurance premiums – the more resilient you are, the more likely insurers will consider you a lower risk.

Step-by-step guide to business continuity planning

This guide will get you thinking about how to protect the most important aspects of your business. As you go through each step, consider:

- Your particular risks if something goes wrong.
- How you might get back to business-as-usual as quickly and smoothly as possible.
- What the options are if you can’t get back to business-as-usual.

It’s important to think of different options rather than absolutes.

Step 1. Identify key products or services

- What are the biggest risks to your most profitable activity? How can you reduce these risks?

- What is essential to produce or carry out these key activities, eg raw materials, a fully functioning website?
- Can you get by without your full suite of products or services?
- What is your least profitable activity? Be prepared to pause or stop this until you get back on your feet.

Step 2. Identify key internal people

- If you have staff, could your business continue without some or all of them on deck?
- Does your business rely heavily on one person for key tasks? What happens if this person is unavailable? What are the main duties of all staff?
- How might you get temporary staff at short notice?
- How can you support staff and their families if they are affected?

Step 3. Identify key connections

These might be suppliers, service providers, clients or regular customers.

- How robust is your supply chain?
- If your business relies on external suppliers or manufacturers, do you have a backup if something goes wrong?
- If your business uses transport to deliver products or services, what are your alternatives if something goes wrong? Can you rent vehicles?
- Who might help you get back on your feet? Do you have good relationships with your bank, landlord or advisors?
- Who can help if you can’t get into your premises or IT systems?

Step 4. Identify essential equipment and supplies

- If you rely on your own equipment to make products, could you borrow or rent alternative equipment or premises if yours are out of action?
- Could your staff use their home computers for work if business computers are unavailable? Find out who has suitable devices – the business can help pay for internet use.

Step 5. Consider relocation options

- If you need to vacate your usual premises unexpectedly, how can you keep your business ticking along?
- Could staff work from an alternative site, or from home, if your premises can’t be used? You may want to ask your main suppliers, customers – even competitors – if they could spare room in their premises in an emergency.
- If you need to move, how can you best communicate with your customers about your new location – and from your new location?

Step 6. Consider insurance options

- What could go wrong with my business or at work?



- >> • Have I got it covered?
- Is business interruption insurance, which covers against losses after an emergency, a good option?

Step 7. Identify who can run the business in your absence

- If something takes you or another important team member away from the business, who can take over important tasks?
- If there's a major disruption, what is each staff member's role in getting the business back on its feet?

Step 8. Keep contact details handy

- Do you have emergency contact details handy? This list may include staff, emergency services, clients and suppliers. You may also include your insurance details, security company and neighbouring businesses.
- When were contact details last updated – is it time to check for any changes?

Step 9. Back up important data

- What data – customer details, emails, files and spreadsheets – are critical to your business?
- What sensitive data – personnel files, bank details, tax documents – do you need to keep safe?
- Do you regularly back up data on a hard drive, server or in the cloud? It's time to start if you don't do this already.

Step 10. Put it into practice

Much like emergency plans, a business continuity plan shouldn't sit on the shelf. It needs to be tried and tested with relevant staff at least once a year. This doesn't need to be expensive or time-consuming.

Run 20-minute stress test exercises where you give staff a scenario to plan for. Rather than fixating on the cause of the disruption, eg a natural disaster or power cut, focus on how to manage the consequences.

No two crises are the same. But together, you may find similar solutions to different situations. Your plan will change as your business evolves, so make sure you debrief after each test and update the plan if necessary.

Staff need to know what to do even if you're not available. Make sure your plan is easily accessible.

For a downloadable guide and template that walks you through important steps of BCP, see Wellington Emergency Management Office's website Get Prepared. <http://getprepared.nz/organisations>.

Resilient Organisations has resources to help small businesses thrive, see <https://www.resorgs.org.nz/resources/resilience-booklets/>

Information thanks to Business NZ, view the full article at: <https://www.business.govt.nz/risks-and-operations/planning-for-the-unexpected-bcp/continuity-and-contingency-planning/>

Nature coming indoors

There's a definite trend to nature coming indoors, but in most homes that's using greens or botanical wallpaper. Ben tells us about his less than desirable experience with 'nature' coming indoors...

"Most kiwis like pukekos. I don't. Here's why..."

In the past they have repeatedly uprooted my tomato plants by day and at night they have run across my roof like a band of demented line dancers.



So when on a hot summer's day a lone pukeko enters a new house I am painting and wallpapering, I lose it.

Arms waving, cursing I ran at it. It panics. Forgetting how it got in, it takes flight unleashing the contents of its bowels everywhere, before alighting on the windowsill and pukeko pooping on the sill and down the newly hung wallpaper. That was expensive wallpaper. Even David Attenborough would have had to reconsider his love of nature. It left and I was left with an expensive headache.

My son thought it humorous to buy me a porcelain pukeko. I put it on the toilet window sill. It's rear end faces the bowl."

How to deliver top customer service

Great customer service is the cornerstone of any company. So how can you ensure that's what you're offering your clients? Here's a quick list of some of the main factors that will leave customers satisfied with your service and will encourage them to pass your name onto their friends and family.

Fast response times

Whether it's a call, an email or a message on your company's Facebook page, you should always aim to respond as quickly as possible. Thanks to the immediacy of modern technology, customers expect to hear back almost right away.

If you're usually too busy, consider setting up an automated reply on your email and a message on your phone saying that's the case, and letting them know that you will get back to them within a set time frame, such as within the next working day. This lets the customer know when they can expect to hear from you so you don't have to keep stopping and starting for every message.

You may also be able to refer them to the FAQs (frequently asked questions) section of your website for answers to the most common questions and more details on your service.

Complaint management

No matter how good you deem your customer service, complaints are unfortunately inevitable at one time or another.

The difference is all in how you manage it. The first step is always to listen to the complaint and figure out exactly what the issue is. In many cases, you'll be able to come up with a solution that is agreeable to both. While you should aim to avoid sinking time and funds into customers who can't be impressed no matter what you do, most clients will appreciate the extra effort you put into fixing the issue, and may end up your biggest advocates.

Saying thanks

After each project or job, reach out to say thanks. It may be a simple email or a quick card in the mail, or even a note that you leave behind at your client's home or business when you leave. This will help cement you in your customers' minds as professional and polite.

Keep an eye out on the next TradeLines for more top customer service tips!



Catch you next month!

TwoCan, Editor.

