



Using Today's Technology to Plan for Tomorrow's Disaster

Mobile technology and social media are everywhere—in our pockets and purses, on our wrists, and in our cars—and are changing the way businesses function on a daily basis and how they respond to and recover from a disaster. Just as new technology improves efficiencies in everyday business operations, it also can be incorporated into a business continuity plan to facilitate both work processes and communications if normal systems are damaged or disrupted. That said, the same cyber-security protections developed for regular operations need to be put in place when relying on technology and social media for recovery.



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

More and more emergency management officials are using social media to warn communities about approaching weather conditions, including how to prepare and what to do after an emergency or disaster. More and more small businesses are also taking advantage of social media to communicate with employees, customers and business partners. This allows them to communicate more quickly, widely, and accurately, leading to more efficient response and recovery efforts, and controlling misinformation and potential rumors.

The social media platforms listed below can all be used to provide important information to employees such as updates on an organization's status after a disruption, alerts to an unexpected office closure or other schedule change, or details about an alternate location where employees can report to work. Importantly, the information is shared in real time on platforms employees already use and can access on their devices.



LINKEDIN

Though primarily used for professional networking, businesses can create LinkedIn members-only groups. With a LinkedIn company group, business owners can create their own company intranet on the LinkedIn platform where they can share information related to a business outage or other emergency with their employees. Members-only group discussions can only be seen by group members and discussions do not appear in search engine results.



TWITTER

Twitter offers the ability to create closed groups and private discussions. With the option to tweet privately, business owners can share short bits of information with their employees. Using an emergency employee-only hashtag such as #acmeemployees, business owners can relay important information to their employees.



FACEBOOK

Businesses can create a private Facebook group page for their employees, which can then be used to share information, links, photos, documents and videos. Members of the business' private Facebook group page are limited to those people invited and confirmed by the group administrator.



Access to a Yammer network is determined by a user's Internet domain, making access available only to those individuals with the organization's email account. Yammer can be used to quickly disseminate news and keep employees updated.

Deciding which social media platforms will work best for the business owner will depend on several factors—most importantly, the platforms already used by employees should be considered, as these are likely to be the easiest to implement. This determination should be part of pre-disaster planning to ensure the chosen platforms are as effective as possible.

HELPFUL WEB-BASED & ONLINE TOOLS

In addition to social media platforms, there is a wealth of online tools businesses can use to facilitate normal work functions in the event of a business disruption. Below are some of the more popular tools businesses are using to prepare employees for emergencies and their aftermath:

- VPN for connecting to the network outside of the office
- Cloud services for storage and file sharing
- Live video meeting/web-conferencing capabilities to meet with staff (e.g., Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, etc.)
- Online text message and notification services for messaging staff and others

The services discussed in this article work best when incorporated into a business continuity tool that focuses on all critical people, operations, information, and financial needs—like IBHS' OFB-EZ®. This free business continuity planning toolkit helps businesses translate professional continuity concepts into an easy-to-use guide. By using OFB-EZ, a small business can take advantage of many disaster planning and recovery best practices without the need for a large company budget. To download OFB-EZ, go to DisasterSafety.org/ibhs-business-protection/ofb-ez-business-continuity, and incorporate the benefits of today's technology into your business continuity plan.

POST-KATRINA TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES

IBHS helped to create a comprehensive resilience guide for the city of New Orleans' small business community. Along with presenters from Stay Local! and Water Works, IBHS conducted several business continuity workshops promoted by the city. In preparation for these workshops, Water Works developed case studies to chronicle businesses who went through and recovered from Hurricane Katrina, and are now utilizing 21st century technology to prepare for future disasters. Below is one of those stories provided by Water Works.

Renaissance Publishing LLC was formed in 2005. When Hurricane Katrina struck in August of that year, the company was housing all of its data on a server located in their 18th floor office. Even though the data was safe from flood waters, the company had difficulty accessing their office in the aftermath of the storm and struggled with how to continue their operations remotely. The solution was to make the company more mobile and movable by subletting an office in Baton Rouge and having people work remotely. Ten years later, their server exists in the cloud and employees have laptops and mobile phones, allowing them to move their entire operation to another location within 24 hours. In addition, the company has been able to secure the services of an online notification tool designed specifically for small businesses. For a minimal monthly fee, and with Internet access and a mobile or desktop web browser, key staff are now able to send one text message to all staff to alert them of many different issues such as road closures, traffic accidents, weather alerts, network issues and more.



Stay Local! is the Greater New Orleans' Independent Business Alliance that connects locally owned, independent businesses to customers and resources.



Water Works is a company dedicated to building resilient communities in which water is managed effectively to reduce flooding and water pollution.