

What's going to happen next? Digital Archiving and Continuity Planning

As the next hurricane season approaches, we start to ask ourselves, "What's going to happen next?" In the past few years we have seen such horrific disasters as 9/11, the Tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina. It is important to ask ourselves what lessons have we learned from such disasters and to plan ahead for the next one, even though we do not know when or how it will strike.

Businesses need to be prepared as to what they would do in case of an emergency or disaster. They need to consider what is necessary for continuing to do business and serving their clients, even if their headquarters is knocked out. What are the essentials for continuing to provide service? What documents are required for these services? A continuity plan is a logistical plan for how to recover and restore partially or completely interrupted functions of a business after a disaster or an extended disruption. It is as important as your business and marketing plans. It provides the steps you need to follow if an emergency or disaster strikes, and for how to stay in business when they do.

How do I create a continuity plan? There are many software packages that can be purchased over the internet to help in the planning process, but there are five major steps in creating a plan: analysis, solution design, implementation, testing and organization acceptance, and maintenance. Briefly, it is important during the analysis phase to consult with every department and identify the essential documents and processes that the department needs to continue functioning. Secondly, a solution must be created as to how those documents and functions are going to continue if the office infrastructure is no longer there.

The best way to assure that business documents are protected in the event of a catastrophe is by digitally archiving the information. Electronic documents are far less fragile than paper documents. Due to the fact that they are easily reproducible and do not take up a lot of storage space, they can be reproduced and evacuated quickly. Copies of the information may also be stored at another location or on the internet, which enables the recovery of the information from any computer. Important paper documents should be scanned and turned into electronic files. Therefore, if the paper document is destroyed in the disaster, the information is not lost and it is protected on the computer.

To begin the digital archiving process, department heads should create a unified indexing system for their departments, which will allow for easy maintenance of the digital archiving system over time. That provides a framework and a logical process for filing information. Once the framework has been decided, then the documents are scanned and imported into the filing structure. The documents would be available via the intranet, the internet, or on CDs and external hard drives. The documents would be available to everyone in the organization who needs to have access to them. Not only is digital archiving an extremely important step in the disaster recovery process and it will save businesses thousands and millions of dollars in asset protection and continuity of service to clients, but it is an extremely cost-effective way of archiving essential company information on a daily basis.

Planning ahead is the key ingredient to success after a disaster. Do not wait until disaster strikes to figure out how your business would cope. Continuity planning and digital archiving are essential ingredients to a successful disaster recovery. Be a success story and not a sob story when that time comes and prepare for the worst, which can often times, bring out the best in a business.

If you would like more information about digital archiving, please contact Vivica Williams at archSCAN, LLC. vivicaw@comcast.net, (443) 710-5700.