

SMALL BUSINESS

Be prepared for the worst

It's not pleasant thought, how would your business cope with a major disaster?

The massive destruction of records and data in the World Trade Centre attack of last month highlights the importance of recovery and back-up plans, business recovery experts warn.

With literally thousands of offices, filing cabinets and computers destroyed in the attack, trying to get a business back on track is proving a mammoth task.

However, it doesn't take a disaster the scale of the New York terrorist attacks to cause major disruptions. In many cases, much smaller problems like a fire, flood or theft can be enough to topple a business.

Adrian Bogatez, managing director of business continuity company Classic Blue, says many companies which occupied the World Trade Center maintained essential business operations by relocating to disaster recovery facilities.

They could only do this because they had detailed business continuity plans for both their operations and computer networks.

"Many more businesses didn't have an effective plan in place and have had to search frantically in the hours and days after the disaster for somewhere to host their operations or try to retrieve lost data while they couldn't access their buildings," Mr Bogatez says.

Although the scale of the US attack was unprecedented, there are plenty of other examples, such as the Newcastle Earthquake, which could have had a similar impact on company operations.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry assisted many of those hit by the Newcastle Earthquake and, like small business bodies, encourages business operators to consider such risks seriously.

Mr Bogatez says that in light of the US attack and with the potential for more uncertainty in the short-term, all businesses should

have a serious look at how they would cope with a similar disaster.

"Nobody likes to think that disasters could happen to them, but the reality is that they do happen and successful planning is the key to minimising the damage, Mr Bogatez says.

He also says that there are other benefits to having adequate disaster recovery plans than just being able to get your business up and running again in the event of a catastrophe.

"A good business continuity plan will not only assist to keep your business functional, but it will also boost confidence with investors and employees."

And, like a normal business plan, once a disaster recovery plan is in place, don't just forget about it, advises Mr Bogatez.

"All businesses should re-evaluate and test their business continuity plan on a regular basis to ensure that the relevant provisions are available if the unexpected hits."

The Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Enterprise Centres and other small business bodies can assist firms looking for advice.



DREW GIBSON

The best way to recover from a disaster is to start planning now