

STEP 5: REHEARSAL AND STAFF TRAINING

Once the plan has been developed, it has to be subjected to rigorous testing. Testing should be carried out in an environment to reproduce authentic conditions.

Although it might not be practicable to change premises for a few days, it might be a good idea to test operating at other premises with the key staff for a few hours. You may believe this is costly or unproductive but it is a practical investment for your company's survival: should an incident happen for real you will be better able to cope with it.

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It is important to instill a culture of business continuity management awareness from the very beginning throughout the company. A truly effective BCP must reflect 'business as usual' management process and be driven from the top of the organisation. It should be clearly set out in the organisation vision statement that is fully endorsed and actively promoted by the Board or the Executive Committee.

It is vital to test the plan with all the appointed business continuity team persons to make sure each is fully aware of their own responsibilities. They should be given a copy to read through and to understand their own particular responsibilities. By training your team in the details of the plan they will be much more efficient at implementing it should the need arise, and they may well have useful feedback to give about their own area of company expertise.

It is also important to revise your plan regularly, to reflect staff turnover and updates in technology, for example. Assign the duty of updating the plan to a member of staff and make sure it is regarded as an important regular activity.

There are numerous ways in which you could test your plan. Here are a few simple examples:

Paper-based exercises:

Read through the plan, questioning each action.

Test the plan using what if scenarios. (New pieces of information can be added as the scenario unfolds, in the same way that more details would become clear in a real incident.)

Telephone Cascading

This involves testing your Staff Communication Tree: initiate the process of phoning or texting people at the top of the tree. Measure the time it takes for the last people to receive the message. This also allows you to test the whole communication structure (are there any people on the list who have left the company?).

Full rehearsal

If it's carried out in similar conditions to a real incident, it will show you how the different elements of the plan fit together. This may be expensive, especially if it involves changing sites, but planning will reduce costs and the efforts might pay off in the future.

How often should the plan be tested?

Your plan will need a full rehearsal at least once a year and will also need to be maintained and updated regularly by an appointed person(s).