Preparing your Broadband Continuity Plan

Your broadband service can be a critical business asset. If your broadband service failed, could your business continue to operate effectively? To minimise the risk, you are advised to:

A Perform a 'risk assessment' for your business' use of broadband

B Obtain the most resilient broadband service that you can afford – to match the level of risk

C Write an action plan of what you would do if your broadband service failed (outage)

A. Perform a risk assessment for your business use of broadband

A risk assessment will identify all your uses of broadband services and assess the likelihood of the service failing, or working poorly, along with the potential impact. Where a degraded or failed service is likely, and its impact considered serious, the following steps are recommended.

B. Obtain the most resilient broadband service that you can afford – to match the level of risk.

Explain to your provider your business situation

It is important that your provider knows that your telecommunications infrastructure is 'business critical' – this sets the service level expectation.

Ask your provider for 'Business Grade' services / solutions

Request detailed written material on what 'Business Grade' includes, for example:

- What reliability features are provided with your broadband service? e.g. redundant links, automatic backup or failover, diverse access paths, multi-site data centres, etc.

- Do they provide Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and do these have availability guarantees with accompanying penalty clauses for non-compliance?

- What is the cost for business grade solutions? Compare them with standard grade services so you can justify the difference and make an informed decision

- Some providers offer an integrated solution, for example, combining a fixed line with wireless failover – ask about these types of solutions

Consider obtaining an extra broadband service or wireless failover

If integrated solutions offered by providers are too costly or not suitable for your business, you can order a separate backup service (usually called a failover) from a different provider. For example, if you have a DSL broadband service, your failover can be a DSL or wireless broadband service from a different provider. Ask providers if they have diverse paths (different connections) into your building so at least one link (primary or failover) will work if there is physical damage to the line, such as by excavation in the street.

Use automatic failover and set it up in advance

It is often possible to configure your IT equipment in advance to automatically divert to the 'failover' service in the event your main service fails. If this is not possible, make sure you prepare a readily available step-by-step guide to manually switch to the failover service.

Purchase an auto-failover product

If having an extra broadband service is too expensive or not practical for other reasons, equipment is available that can automatically divert to a wireless service when needed. Before choosing this option, check that you have good wireless coverage where your IT equipment is located. IT equipment is often behind internal walls or in the basement where an external antenna may be necessary.

Engage an IT company (Systems Integration Company) or IT professional

If possible, you should engage an IT professional or company to set up and maintain your failover solution. If this is not possible, make sure someone in your business knows what to do and is 'on call' if an outage occurs.

Make sure firewalls, authentication systems, and remote access features function with your failover solution

Virtual Private Network (VPN) services, remote access for staff, managed firewalls, and authentication services need to be setup correctly to function with your failover solution or they are likely to stop working and cause further disruption to your business.

It is recommended that you test each of these services when implementing your failover solution.

Test your failover solution on a regular basis

Even the best Business Continuity Plans can fail if they are not regularly tested and rehearsed.

C. Write an action plan of what you would do if your broadband service failed (outage)

Refer to ACCAN's Tip Sheet – 'Preparing your Business Continuity Plan (BCP)'. Some key points are:

- Make a short list of critical business activities and make sure they can function during a broadband outage – identify those activities that can be performed once your failover solution is implemented and/or normal services are restored. For example, capture customer details manually and leave online processing for when systems resume.

- Make sure you include contact details – especially after hours – of all the people needed to help restore your services and details of where your off-site data backup is located.

- Prepare a list of IT, network and telephony equipment and, if possible, a diagram of your IT configuration. Include names and contact details of any service providers you use.

- Outline the steps you will take when vital computers and communications services are not available and who will perform them.

You will need access to someone who knows the technical configuration of your IT services to help prepare this action plan. In addition to the BCP tips listed above, the action plan will take into account specific steps that arise from item 'B' in this tip sheet.

You should display the plan prominently in your office and regularly review and update it.
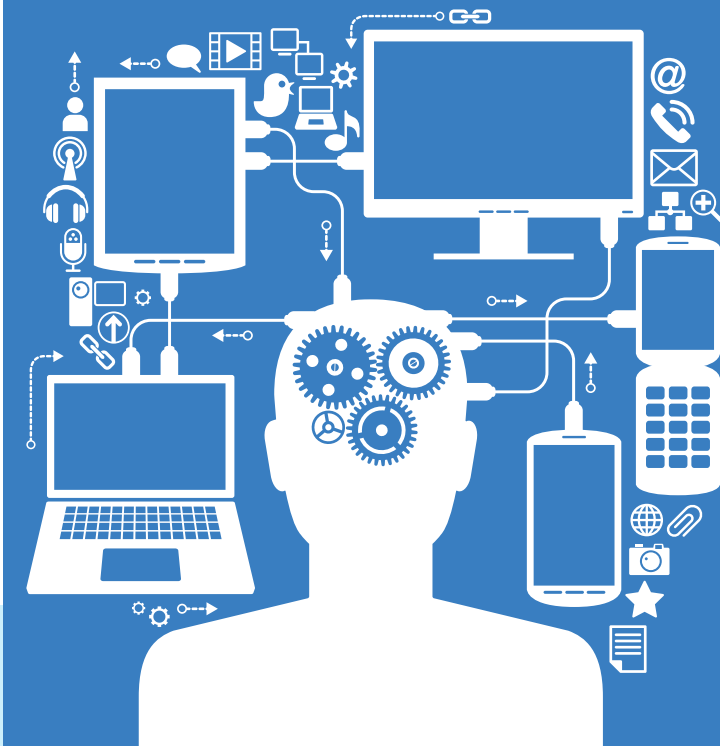
Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

BROADBAND CONTINUITY PLAN

SMALL BUSINESS TIPSHEET