# Your disaster recovery plan.

Ensure business continuity for both your internal teams and customers with an effective communications and collaboration strategy.

# Failing to plan is planning to fail

Your company probably already has a disaster recovery plan (DRP) in place for your IT services. You make sure your data is backed up daily and you have written procedures in place to restore a failed piece of hardware should you ever need to. But what happens when your voice services are disrupted?

Any number of events can occur to make your office voice services unusable - from builders accidentally cutting through cables during road works, to an epidemic that results in high staff absenteeism, or even a natural disaster that damages your office. When your staff are unable to answer the phones, business grinds to a halt.

Remember, maintaining internal communication and collaboration is just as critical as your customer communication channels.

Having a proper voice DRP in place ensures that you can keep doing business - and keep your customers happy - no matter what keeps you from opening your office.

# Get out of the weeds

Creating an effective voice DRP is dependant on you gaining a high level overview of your company and the way your communications are handled.

Start by identifying what platforms your employees use to communicate with each other - think calls, IM, video conferencing.

Then look at how calls are made and received by each department. Create a document that includes this information and be sure to make a note of the following:

## Internal conversations

How do you replace Informal lines of communication and collaboration? Crucial forms of knowledge sharing, like the odd conversation over a desk, often lead to fast problem solving & creative ideation.  Can you replicate this spark of social interaction effectively with technology?

## Team meetings

Top down coordination, bottom up feedback – campaign, initiative and project updates. Vital flows of business information and team management are under pressure without proper technology support. Maintain productivity and accountability with regular team conference calls.

## Customer Presentations

The rest of the world may be business as usual, or there may be large macro issues at play. Either way customer needs must be met and impact to new business must be limited. How will external presentations, pitches and proposals carry on?

## Reliable connectivity

Quality connectivity is the foundation of any modern day organisation and crucial to powering your business critical cloud based applications. Can your teams access these effectively remotely? Do you have VPN access in place?

Consider video conferencing to maintain regular face to face engagement between teams and with customers.

## Phone numbers

Which numbers does your company own and where does each of them ring through to when called?

## Inbound call routing

How are calls routed after they are initially answered? You might have an IVR that directs calls automatically, a receptionist who directs them manually, or you might drop callers directly into call queues or ring groups. Make a note of how a call flows through each department in your company, from the time the phone rings to the time the call ends.

## Outbound call routing

What do your staff members need to do in order to make an outbound call? Do they have to dial 9 to get an outside line? Do they have account codes that need to be entered to call long distance numbers? Document the procedures that must be followed to make an outbound call under normal circumstances so that you will know how the procedure differs during a disaster.

Do you have the ability to make real time changes to your call plans remotely? Implementing a solution that is cloud based can ensure you remain in control whether in or out of the office.

## Key personnel

If there are a handful of staff members who handle the majority of the calls in your organisation, write that down. These are the people who need to receive calls the most in the event of a disaster. If they are well trained on how your voice services will change during a disaster, you won't need to worry about answering "how do I…" questions.

## Supplier information

Ensure you include contact details for your key telecoms and connectivity suppliers. They will be able to help you implement your recovery plans if necessary.

Gain a thorough understanding of how calls are made and received at your company and make sure it is documented in detail.

Many cloud based phone systems offer CRM integration - this can be an easy way to ensure your teams can access the right contact details for customers and suppliers when working remotely.

# Identify threats

Now that you know how calls are handled by every department, identify any weak points that could cause the communications process to break down. At this stage you don't need to figure out a solution, you simply need to identify the types of problems that might disrupt your communications.
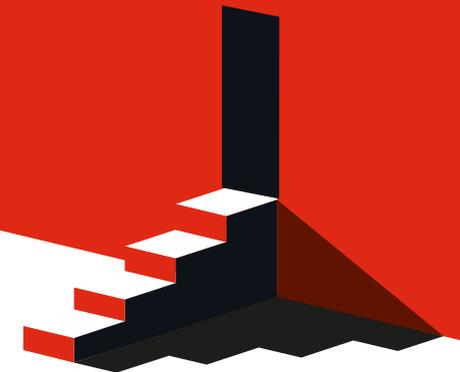
## Key personnel are not available

Is there anyone else who can answer calls? Are they correctly trained to do so? Can you create call plans in advance to trigger overflow call routing when teams are unavailable?

## Most staff are unable to get to the office

Staff absenteeism can happen due to ill health, pandemics, extreme weather that can make commuting difficult, or even your own company functions.

No matter why absenteeism might occur, you need to ensure you understand the impact it will have on your ability to handle and route calls.

## Your phone lines are dead

Maybe someone has cut the wrong cable, or a disaster has damaged your office location. Whatever the case may be, how does it impact your ability to do business if you pick up the phone and have no dial tone? Do you have any single points of failure that need addressing? How quickly and easily can you reroute calls - to other office locations or mobiles?

## Your office is closed

Not a standard disaster by most definitions, but how a call gets routed when your office is closed - be it outside of business hours, a holiday, or because the office is inaccessible for whatever reason - is important to keep your customers happy and, with sales lines in particular, ensure your business can continue to make money. Are your customers aware that your office is closed when they call in? Are they able to reach the right department on their own, or are they directed to a general delivery voicemail system and left feeling like nobody will ever return their call?

# Fill in the blanks

You now know how calls are handled and what might stop those handling processes. Now it's time to figure out how to fill any gaps in your voice DRP. Some solutions will be people or process related, others will be technological in nature. Look into each of the following:

## Unified Communications (UC)

Ensuring your internal teams can keep communicating is crucial – understanding the breadth of services your internal teams use to collaborate with each other, such as IM, conferencing and file sharing applications is important.

Rationalising these services into a single unified communications platform not only reduces the burden and complexity of maintaining these services, but also reduces the risk of one of the disparate systems failing.

A good UC platform will keep conversation flowing, enable better customer support & help boost staff morale whilst working remotely.

## Mobile

A business grade Mobile service is also a key consideration. Your employees will have a wide range of requirements from their mobile service, from using it to make and receive calls, to it becoming a potential source of connectivity should their home broadband fail.

Factor in what your service provider offers – are they focused entirely on businesses? What is their UK wide coverage like? Can they provide the data bundles you require?

Also consider your service wrap – do you have a dedicated account manager to help when things aren't working or when you need to implement change quickly?

## Manual failover

If the person(s) who normally answer your phones aren't in the office, make sure there are others available who can take on that role. They should be trained on how calls are routed throughout your organisation, as well as how to correctly operate any applications or portals involved in the process.

## Automated failover

IVRs can always answer calls without any human intervention required. Having an IVR will let your customers route their own calls if they cannot be answered by a person.

## SIP trunking

If your company still makes use of traditional analogue or ISDN lines, moving to SIP trunking will provide a large range of voice DRP options. SIP trunking solutions will often allow calls to automatically failover to a secondary office location if your primary office is offline. For companies with a single office location, calls can be diverted to a mobile or any other number to ensure they can still be answered.

## Inbound call management services

Alongside SIP, consider implementing a self-serve call management solutions that allow companies to set up and control how calls are routed to their business. This means that any necessary changes can be made, quickly and easily, via an online portal. The last thing you want to be doing in the event of an emergency is sitting on hold, waiting for your phone provider to make changes for you - some changes to legacy ISDN lines can even take days to be implemented!

By choosing a provider who allows you to make these changes yourself, you can get your calls flowing within minutes, using any internet connected device.

## Hosted PBX

Some companies still have PBX equipment at their office locations that handle call routing, voicemail, IVRs and call queues. If your PBX is unavailable, many of the call routing features that you depend on can be lost if calls are then diverted to another location. This can be confusing and frustrating for customers calling in. A hosted PBX solution removes these features from the on-premise equipment and instead hosts them in the cloud. With a hosted PBX, your customers receive the same call flow no matter what's happening at your office locations.

In addition, most hosted PBX services allow your phones to connect to the service from anywhere - so if you have a disaster, your staff can plug a phone in at home, or access the service via a softphone on their desktop, or mobile app and keep working.

## Speak with your service provider

Speak with your service provider to see what business continuity options are available to you. Once you have identified any required solutions, ensure they are put into place. Lastly, take all of your voice DRP documentation and ensure that the people involved in executing the plan have read and understood it.

Make sure a copy of the plan is stored somewhere safe and can be accessed should your office become inaccessible.

# Just do it

Ignoring the creation of a voice DRP is ignoring something that could critically damage your business. Following these steps will ensure you have a bulletproof plan that keeps calls coming in and your business operating.

Ensuring that you have a full voice DRP will provide your customers with an uninterrupted service, keep them happy and keep you in business.

### 1 | Document

Document the call flow processes at your company, both for inbound and outbound calls.

### 2 | Identify

Identify any gaps that might disrupt your call flow. Include gaps caused by people, processes and technology.

### 3 | Resolve

Identify and resolve any gaps that you identify - train additional employees, consider replacing any legacy services with cloud based alternatives, get set up with an inbound call management system or implement whatever new  processes and technology necessary to prevent disruption to your voice communications and team collaboration.

### 4 | Plan

Document your plan in detail and distribute it to everyone who plays a part in the plans execution. Consider saving your plans in an online shared drive or cloud based application, so that they can be referenced from any location.

# Contact

## Local Company - Global Solutions

Now could be the time to consider moving to a cloud hosted solution to realise all the benefits that cloud telephony offers.

Midland Communications is accredited for the sales and support of equipment and platforms supplied by the world's leading companies.

With our central location in the Midlands, we're well placed to service customers all over the UK.

Contact us to discuss a Remote Working and Cloud Hosted pathway to meet and future proof your business and your customers' needs.

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