

# Disaster and Pandemic Preparedness: A Manager's Checklist

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Despite the relatively slow spread of the H1N1 flu epidemic, headlines about pandemic preparedness have certainly caught the world's attention. Even if the virus doesn't return aggressively in the fall, the old adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" holds instructional value for us all. Currently, concerns are being addressed on several levels:

- World health organizations are identifying risk and working on vaccines.
- Individuals in at-risk areas are stocking up on supplies to avoid unnecessary contact with others.
- Some countries are taking an extreme approach by restricting travel.

## What Would a Pandemic Crisis Mean for Your Business?

If your business isn't prepared, pandemic — as well as other catastrophic events such as fires, floods, and devastating storms — can jeopardize your ability to continue operations and threaten your organization's mere existence.

Few businesses can survive without ready access to business-critical information. If a disaster results in social distancing, quarantine, or inability to access your place of business, the same measures that protect your staff and customers as individuals may make your business vulnerable, or even terminate it. Unless you are an experienced online retailer or have a strong web-based enterprise content management (ECM) and workflow solution, you might not survive a pandemic challenge. If you do, you may emerge with a reduced clientele or other serious handicap.

## Are you ready?

Are you equipped in the event your office is temporarily closed and employee interaction is impractical? Will you be able to:

- Access the required documents, remotely?
- Search electronically for business-critical information?
- Respond effectively to customer orders and inquiries?
- Capture, store, and route incoming mail, images, voice-mail, etc., electronically?
- Restrict access to sensitive files by department or job role?
- Index documents thoroughly so everyone with access can find them?
- Amend roles and responsibilities as changing needs dictate?
- Distribute and re-allocate work in response to absenteeism?
- Train new staff to follow existing processes without in-person training?
- Ensure staff is still being productive?
- Verify work volumes are being handled adequately?
- Make sure rules are followed consistently?
- Ensure work is prioritized appropriately?
- Access data analytics and extract real-time reports to ensure

sound decision making?

If you are preparing to automate your business processes, you should ask:

- Which processes are absolutely essential to your business continuance?
- Which are secondary and can afford to be delayed?
- Are adequate backup plans in place for the database, repository, and configuration files to enable seamless operations if the system unexpectedly shuts down?

Like an emergency fire drill, successful execution of an ECM disaster preparedness plan relies on solid communication and testing. Ask yourself:

- Who must be notified first?
- Are there companies that count on us — or vendors on whose business our company relies — who need to be alerted of our plans?
- What communications do we need to have with customers if disaster strikes?
- How can we test our plan to make sure it will work?
- Has the plan been communicated to everyone who needs it?
- Is the plan web-accessible?

Web-based management of your business-critical content gives you flexibility and agility to adapt in a rapidly changing business environment, wherever you are. In the event a pandemic breaks out, you are positioned for success:

- Your chain of command remains clear
- Work continues according to the rules you set in place
- You ensure continuity in your customer relationships
- You're no longer dependent on postal and shipping services
- Risky face-to-face transactions can be avoided

When coupled with tools for intelligent and consistent process automation, a web-based ECM system ensures you'll have the armor you need, regardless of the circumstances. By equipping yourself ahead of time, if and when disaster strikes you'll not just survive the battle — you'll come out a winner. When business returns to normal, you'll have a detailed record of every transaction, protecting you in the event of litigation, and making audits a brief interruption rather than a time-consuming nightmare.

ECM isn't just a bad-weather friend. Take advantage of the efficiency gains today, and you will be well-positioned to grow cost-effectively when the good times return. It's never too soon to be ready for success.

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