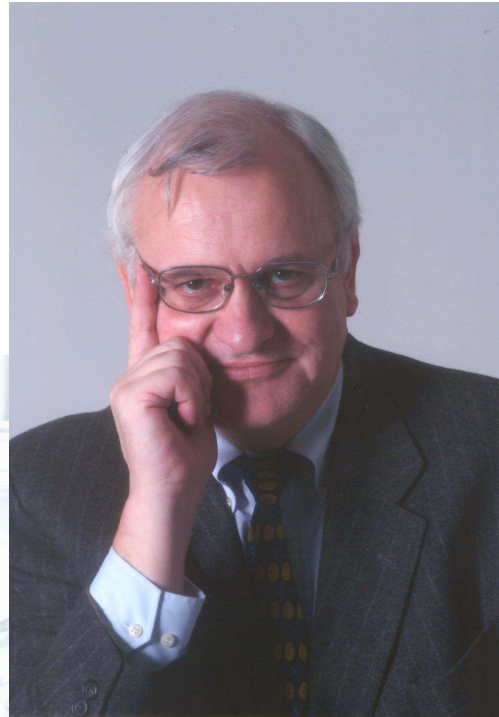


DISASTERS

Recent events in the USA and in London have exposed many weaknesses in the infrastructures of our western economies. On July 7th as we all know London experienced its worst terrorist attack in years, if not ever. Those in London on that day know that even if they were fortunate enough to escape the direct effects of the attacks, there were serious consequences for them. The closure of all public transport, the inability of the mobile phone networks to cope with the loads placed on them and the near impossibility of finding out what was really happening around them added to the difficulties of the day. Many contingency plans were exercised that day, and no doubt many have been updated since.



THINGS GO WRONG

We live in a world where things can and do go wrong. External groups can cause disruption; systems can fail through lack of maintenance, or mis-use, or wear and tear; accidents happen. Any business needing to provide an uninterrupted service to its customers needs to think carefully about how to set about planning for the unexpected, and needs to put some contingency plans in place.

PLANNING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Start by thinking about the levels of service you need to provide to your customers. How quickly do you need to respond? What about your responsibilities to the public or to your staff. List everything you can think of. Next, consider what eventualities would cause you to be unable to meet those obligations, and work through the ways of dealing with them. Assess the risk and impact of such eventualities. For those eventualities that would have a high impact document the procedures so anyone can follow them while working in a pressured situation.

ANALYSE THE SYSTEM

Consider 'single points of failure' where the failure of one component or system, however small or apparently insignificant will nevertheless make recovery impossible. Where computers are concerned consider not only the impact of having to repair or replace hardware but the cost and time of rebuilding the whole system (I am assuming you have a good backup strategy in place). Consider duplicating critical systems and communications links. Consider holding critical spare parts, disks for example, on site in case of need. Don't neglect the people aspects – can the availability of the necessary skills be guaranteed?

We all hope that our plans will never need to be put into effect. But if they are used and if they have been well constructed they will have been well worth the small investment in time and forethought.

Handy Hint

Spend some time learning windows short cut keys. Ctrl+A to select all, Ctrl+C to copy, Ctrl+V to paste and so on. They can save a great deal of time.

This article was originally published in the Newbury Weekly News Business Review in August 2005.

Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/. For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email lisa@itsolve.co.uk.

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