

Emergency Preparedness

John Swanciger Explains How Small Businesses Can Prepare Before Disaster Strikes

Due to their relative size, small businesses are often susceptible to many worst-case scenarios that a larger organization might withstand, but natural disasters may still pose the biggest threat. According to Manta's latest Wellness Index, 37% of business owners say that they could not recover from a catastrophic event such as a natural disaster. The Wellness Index is based on interactions with small business owners and subject-matter experts. Manta CEO John Swanciger recently spoke with *Professional Safety* about how small businesses can prepare for such events.

Small business owners should examine their business continuity plans, or create one if it does not exist. "It's vital to develop robust business continuity plans capable of enduring the physical, financial and emotional toll of natural disasters," says Swanciger. "By maintaining preparation strategies, small business owners have a better chance of bouncing back from destruction. [Since] they generally have smaller budgets and insurance packages, small businesses are especially vulnerable to natural disasters and can get hit harder by temporary slowdowns."

For businesses already trying to recover from a worst-case scenario, preparedness may not be an option, especially with measures such as adjusting insurance coverage and policies. Swanciger says in these cases, best practices still apply. "In the wake of a disaster, owners must take charge and decide the order in which certain business operations will be restored," he says. "This will allow your business to get up and running as quickly as possible."

He also says that owners should assign communication responsibilities and appoint a public spokesperson, a client or vendor contact, and an employee responsible for contacting the insurance company. This way, owners can ensure that all key stakeholders are informed. "Maintaining strong relationships with employees, vendors and customers provides small business owners with the support system they need to effectively work through the recovery process," he explains.



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Swanciger has seen some of these tips in action, especially during recent events. "When family-owned restaurants in Flint, MI, experienced a water crisis, none of the owners had a premade plan of action specific to water contamination," he says. "But, they powered through. Business owners were quick to contact customers, vendors and employees about the contamination, and communicated their plan to keep the restaurants open. Employees were also trained to be transparent on the topic, and modify their serving strategies."

He says the restaurants did this by serving bottled water to customers instead of bringing prefilled glasses of water to the tables. Swanciger says that pivotal action offered safety to diners and built a positive image for the small business owners and allowed them to stay afloat.

Some businesses simply may not have the resources to closely follow all of these suggestions for various reasons, such as insurance costs, few employees or lack of web-based communication. For these employers, Swanciger notes, "As long as you are taking precautions, you are more prepared than those who are not." For example, he suggests, "If you cannot afford the paid version of a cloud solution, try the free version." Similarly, those with too few employees for a phone tree, employers should at least have each employee's updated contact information and emergency contacts. "Little precautions like this make all the difference," he says.



John Swanciger is CEO of Manta. He has deep experience building highly scalable platforms and marketplaces. He holds a B.S. in Finance from Boston College.