

## Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Study from a Computer Printing Services Sub Supply Company

### Introduction

This case study is one of ten written as a part of a study undertaken on *Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic*. The objective is to raise awareness among business enterprises in Ireland of the need for business continuity planning (BCP) for the possible arrival of a 'flu pandemic in Ireland.

The case study is based on a real company, but is fictionalised in some respects. Key details, including the company's name, have been altered to protect its identity.

As this company, like many in Ireland, is only beginning to appreciate the need to plan for a 'flu pandemic, their plan is not yet complete. The case study necessarily reflects this continuing planning process.

### Background

1. Computer Printing Services Limited (CPSL) supplies and maintains computer printing services for companies in Ireland.
2. Clients include financial institutions, Government Departments, professional service organisations and medium and large companies.
3. The company supplies printing hardware and consumables. Under the terms of a service level agreement, it responds to requests for maintenance support.
4. It has over 50 clients, together comprising approximately 400 sites, and supports over 3,000 pieces of hardware.
5. CPSL employs 10 field engineers responsible for installation and maintenance, and three office staff who take approximately 30 calls per day for maintenance support. In addition, there are two engineers based in a maintenance workshop at head office.
6. Where possible, service requests are resolved by phone/e-mail in the first instance; by a visit from a field engineer in the second instance; and if necessary by collection and repair of the equipment in the workshop and return or replacement within 48 hours.
7. CPSL already has a detailed business continuity plan in place to address situations such as total computer failure, fire, flood or other similar disaster situations. This plan is the responsibility of the Finance Director.
8. CPSL had not considered including a 'flu pandemic as part of this planning process until they were approached by one of their customers, a major financial institution, as a part of its own BCP for a 'flu pandemic.
9. In circumstances where 40% of CPSL's staff were absent, the company would find it difficult to meet current service level demands.
10. In response to the financial institution's enquiry, the issue of pandemic preparedness was raised at a CPSL board meeting. The Finance Director was asked to take the necessary steps to cover a 'flu pandemic within the company's business continuity planning process.

## 1: Planning Activities

Planning involved the following steps:

1. The Finance Director prepared a job description, including responsibilities and a provisional budget for the preparation and implementation of the plan, for approval by the board.
2. He identified websites and other information sources for up-to-date information regarding a 'flu pandemic e.g. Department of Health and Children, Health Service Executive, World Health Organisation.
3. With the cooperation of staff representatives, he requested contact details (e.g. mobile numbers, e-mail addresses, home numbers and addresses) of all staff, for use in the event of an emergency only, and to facilitate tracking staff and communicating up-to-date information.
4. He contacted all “critical” suppliers to request details of their business continuity plans in the event of a 'flu pandemic, just as the bank had approached CPSL.
5. Based on the WHO 'Alert Framework' he identified trigger points to be included in the plan.

## 2: Issues to be Addressed

1. The Finance Director identified critical activities for the continuity of the business in the event of 40% of the staff being unavailable. These included:
  - Maintenance engineers
  - Call centre staff
  - Office cleaning
  - Logistics service providers
  - Spares and consumables suppliers

He developed measures to underpin continuity of these critical activities.

## 3: Measures to Underpin Continuity

1. The Finance Director listed all staff qualified to undertake the “critical” activities he had identified, for example, sales and marketing personnel who had previously worked in maintenance and who could undertake maintenance work if necessary.
2. He prioritised customers in terms of impact (e.g. banks versus professional service organisations; health related departments versus commercial organisations) and prepared draft revised service level agreements.
3. With the operations manager, he reviewed each customer to identify opportunities for centralising printing services, and therefore reducing the equipment to be maintained.
4. He developed “scenarios” with different critical staff being unavailable, and nominated other staff to replace them.
5. With appropriate medical advice, he developed policies for returning to work after infection, and for those showing (or likely to show) symptoms while at work.

6. He developed policies to facilitate working from home, including expenses related to telephone calls and installation of broadband.
7. He prepared a practical exercise to test the plan, to be implemented in advance of the pandemic, but, to avoid unnecessary worry among staff and customers, only when the threat of a pandemic is imminent.

#### 4: Response to Workplace Risk

1. In consultation with other members of the management team, the Finance Director devised work practices where face-to-face contact with customers was minimised, for example with service calls being managed by phone and with service call staff working from home.
2. Draft hygiene notices were prepared for printing.
3. He sought advice, and arranged for the office cleaner to be appropriately trained on hygiene requirements.
4. He ordered stocks of hand wash, towels, tissues and other necessary materials.
5. He proposed that all travel outside Ireland be cancelled during the period of the pandemic.
6. He prepared information for individual employees and their families to be circulated in the event of a pandemic, on topics including: hygiene; identification of symptoms; and policies on absence from work.
7. He prepared a briefing for staff, to be delivered in advance of a pandemic.
8. He developed a template for a company website for use to disseminate information to employees and customers during a pandemic.
9. He approached the industry association to organise a workshop to share best practice in relation to planning for a pandemic.

#### Challenges of Planning for a 'Flu Pandemic

1. Persuading his managers and suppliers to take the threat of a 'flu pandemic seriously is, and continues to be, a major challenge faced by the finance director in the preparation of the plan.
2. Unlike other emergency plans e.g. computer failure, maintaining the planning process for a 'flu pandemic is more dynamic. Circumstances change daily e.g. new customers, new sites, new priorities which require incorporation in the plan.

#### Conclusion

CPSL is convinced that the investment it is making in planning for a 'flu pandemic is essential to underpinning the future of the business. It is encouraging suppliers and customers to undertake similar exercises.