



Ten Tips for Staying in Touch and Staying in Business During a Flu Pandemic

Traditional business continuity plans will fail in an avian flu pandemic. Restricted movement, quarantines and transportation failures could make moving everyone to a remote location unfeasible. Few plans in place today could successfully continue business operations for the flu's predicted duration of several months and absenteeism rates soaring to 40%. By rethinking business as well as their plans, business owners and crisis planners can take concrete steps today to keep their companies operational even under these unusual circumstances. A sound plan for an avian flu outbreak focuses on strong communication systems and policies.

VoiceNation offers companies ten tips for staying in touch and staying in business:

1. Establish a communications team responsible for ensuring your communications systems work through a pandemic. Develop more than one back up plan in case absenteeism or quarantines make one unworkable. Ensure your carrying capacity and that of your communication partners will accommodate a sudden, large load as companies switch to remote operations.
2. Create and publicize a communications plan. Critical elements include:
 - a schedule for releasing information in a crisis
 - contact information (land line, cell, satellite phone numbers and home email addresses) for all employees, key vendors and customers
 - established chain of communications
 - process for communicating business and employee status
3. Publicize a 1-800 hotline number that employees can use to receive updates so they know whether to come into work, how to contact their managers, what actions the company is taking, and when to return.
4. Create a dedicated website to communicate business status to employees, vendors and customers. A publicized web site can simplify notification to large groups and reduce load on phones and IT systems in a crisis. The web site can let customers know what services you can offer, any special conditions, and changes in your operations.

5. Offer remote access through a virtual private network to your employees. Ensure that managers and staff have access to the critical information and programs they need through secure systems. Consider managing pressure on your company servers by adopting multiple shifts.
6. Expand on-line services to customers by automating as much of your business as possible. Even if your business is unaffected, your customers may be in quarantined areas and restricted to work they can do on-line.
7. Arrange for your phones to automatically transfer to an automated or live answering service that will route calls to cell phones, home phones or other locations. Customers and suppliers can still reach staff through your main number, regardless of their actual location.
8. Provide robust teleconferencing services to enable staff, customers and vendors to continue to work collaboratively without needing to meet.
9. Plan to forward faxes to another phone number or email address so you do not lose any incoming orders.
10. Contract with a company that can continue to take orders and requests for information for you as a back up. With Web forms and some training, remote operators can keep your business in business while your staff recovers from illness. The Department of Health and Human Services pandemic flu plan assumes that 20% of working adults will become ill in a pandemic.

Call VoiceNation to protect your business in a crisis. For disaster recovery services, contact Joe Schiavone at 866-766-5050, extension 199.

About VoiceNation

VoiceNation is committed to helping businesses succeed by providing creative cost-effective telephony solutions. VoiceNation provides voicemail, Virtual PBX, answering services and disaster recovery services to businesses of all sizes throughout the United States.

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