



Your Success Is Our Business

Nonprofit News



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Working Together To Build Strong Communities

Risk Management...Disaster Planning For Your Technology



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During times of crisis, the public turns to the nonprofit sector for assistance, but those local nonprofit organizations may also be struck by the same crisis or disaster.

A business continuity plan has many aspects. First and foremost, the plan must be the health and safety of its employees, and then the needs of customers and clients. To be able to serve the community in the times of crisis or disaster, an organization must rapidly restore mission-critical operations. One of the many aspects of the operations is the technology system of the organization.

In assessing your technology readiness to deal with a disaster, albeit fire, hurricane or computer virus, below are just some of the questions every organization should answer.

1. Within the past 12 months, has your organization made a detailed assessment of all its computer applications and identified which ones are of top priority in supporting routine business operations?
2. Based on the results of study and analysis, do you know the estimated dollar losses your organization would suffer if it had a computer or network outage for a week, two weeks, or a month?
3. Do you think the quality and completeness of your organization's documentation and operating instructions for information systems would enable otherwise qualified strangers to understand and operate your systems without undue delay, research and guesswork?
4. Does your organization back up computer tapes (or diskettes) off-premises, so that at least minor recovery operations might be performed?
5. When was the last time you inventoried your organization's computer backups to ensure that all needed files are being kept? (Be sure to consider your newer applications and changes to older ones.)
6. Within the past 18 months, have you formally surveyed or interviewed key representatives from departments that use and rely on your computers or network to obtain their views on what kind of manual or semi-automated processing could be accomplished if all services were suddenly cut off for periods ranging up to one month?
7. Does your organization have an up-to-date, detailed, written set of procedures on what to do in an emergency and exactly how recovery operations would go forward if your computer facilities were destroyed or made inaccessible?
8. Has your organization performed tests under simulated disaster conditions in order to help verify that its computer processing can be accomplished at an alternate computer site under whatever provisions your organization has for backup and recovery operations?

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A technology disaster recovery plan should make sure all of the above questions are addressed and, hopefully, answered. A technology disaster recovery plan is very similar to insurance – you hope you never have to use it, but you still need it. Some people even believe if you have a technology disaster recovery plan, you will never need it. We wish that were true!

There are also various resources on the web, including www.ibhs.org, www.thebci.org, www.drii.org and www.techsoup.org. We hope your organization never has to implement a technology disaster recovery plan, but consider developing one as a favor to your employees, clients or customers, and your own peace of mind.

Getting the Word Out: Crafting An Effective News Release

Good publicity is a powerful tool. If your organization has been involved in a newsworthy event, it would be a mistake to sit back, cross your fingers, and hope reporters come knocking on your door. Instead, you should send the news directly to the reporters. The proper way of doing this, of course, is through a news release.

It seems as though everybody is writing news releases these days, for all kinds of reasons. With the advent of e-mail, it has become dangerously easy for folks to throw together a hasty news release every time anything remotely interesting happens. Bad idea.

With so many news releases being written, it's more important than ever to make sure your organization's efforts stand out. The combination of strong writing and proper formatting will go a long way toward distinguishing your news release from the rest of the crowd. Here are 10 basic tips for writing an effective news release:

1. **Include contact information.** Make sure your contact information appears at either the top or the bottom of the release. Include your name, address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address. A brief description of your organization can also be included at the end of the release.
2. **Be concise.** Remember, reporters are busy people and don't have time to read through excessively wordy releases. Keep it short and keep it simple. Write clearly, stick to the facts, and avoid overly descriptive language and technical jargon.
3. **Timing is everything.** If your news release concerns an event that will occur at a future date, make sure it is sent out well in advance. If your release concerns an event that has already occurred, don't wait too long to get the word out. Even the most interesting news has an expiration date.
4. **Invert your pyramid.** The idea is to put the most relevant information at the start of the story, allowing editors with limited space simply to clip off last paragraphs when necessary, rather than rework the entire article. The first two paragraphs of your release should cover the five W's: *who, what, where, when, and why.*
5. **Use quotes.** One good quote is worth a dozen expository sentences. Whenever possible, use a colorful quote from a representative of your organization, an expert in the field, or someone directly involved with the news event.
6. **Write in the third person.** Using words such as *I, we, or our* will make your release look less like news and more like promotional material. Reporters generally write in the third person and so should you.
7. **Use the proper format.** Begin with either "For Immediate Release" or the date the information may be released. The release itself should begin with a headline either bolded or in all capitals, followed by a sub-headline. The body of the release should begin with your location (city, state) followed by a dash. Align left, single space, and separate paragraphs with a space rather than indenting.
8. **Proofread!** Always carefully proofread everything you write and whenever possible have at least one other person look it over. Misspellings, careless typos, and poor grammar will reflect poorly on your release.
9. **Craft a strong lead and catchy headline.** The lead paragraph of your news release is the most important. It needs to catch your readers' attention and convince them to keep reading. Make it short and snappy, with enough information to give readers a good idea of what the release is about. The same advice holds true for your headline.
10. **Is it really news?** Before you write a news release, take a long, objective look at the news event. Is it timely? Is it of interest to your intended audience? Does it contain new information or new ways of looking at old information? If not, reconsider.

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