

5 tips for business continuity in 2021

By [Stefano Migliore](#)

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By the time you read this, South Africa would have been in a state of lockdown for more than 300 days, and there is no end in sight; here or globally. We know that the economic consequences of this have been devastating for our country. Don't be fooled by the GDP growth numbers for the third quarter of last year; 13,5% off the back of a 16,6% slump the previous quarter is not growth.



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In March last year, businesses planned for a three-week closure. For some, this was manageable, but as the crisis dragged on the situation has become untenable. In September Redflank, a specialist management consultancy reported that 76% of local businesses experienced revenue losses due to the pandemic. They also found that 4% of all South African companies had permanently closed. By December, Finfind published a report showing that existing debt, lack of cash reserves, outdated financials, no access to relief funding, and an inability to operate during the lockdown, forced the closure of 42.7% of small businesses.

In times of uncertainty, one thing is certain: it's vital to have a solid continuity plan in place for your business. Running a successful and sustainable business relies on a healthy and available workforce and an understanding of how to serve your customers, regardless of market conditions. You need to understand what processes are affected by your worst-case scenario and build solutions to limit the impact on your business, customers and employees.

If you're still in business and don't have a business continuity plan, or are not sure that what you have is still relevant, here are five easy steps to developing one. Follow these tips to help you bolster your business for the uncertain future; not just for the coronavirus but any other significant disruption.

1. What are your purpose and objectives

As with any business plan, you need to be clear about the purpose of your business, your objectives and the scope of work necessary to achieve these. Be quite clear in what you're trying to achieve, which departments are essential for this to happen and the desired (but realistic) outcomes.

When laying out your objectives, you should consider the budget you're working with, and resources available. It may be prudent to work on two streams here; one based on your current reality and a second for a few months' time based on accurate income reductions over the past six to nine months.

2. Pick your wingmen

Who across the business will support you through tough times? I'm talking about strategic thinkers, solution-oriented people who know the company and your market well. Depending on your organisation's size and the departments potentially most affected by this, or any, crisis is where you should be sourcing your support team.

Smaller operations sometimes choose to put a single senior employee, or the boss, in charge of implementing the plan. I caution against this as it's a tough job to do and needs varying skills and insights; try to have at least two people supporting the boss on this job. Larger organisations should consider at least one person per affected department and some extra leaders to handle continuity responsibilities.

Depending on the sector you're in, don't forget to consider HR, shop stewards or other employee representatives on your team.

3. Analyse and prioritise

Conducting a business impact analysis is the most crucial aspect of your continuity plan. Here you, and your support team, need to complete an in-depth analysis of the current and future potential threats to each element of your business. Identify your most crucial processes, roles and employees and how long you can survive without any of these in a state of crisis. When going through this extensive analysis, you need to prioritise and label all threats from most severe to least.

4. Communicate

The past year of dispersed working has taught us that communicating with your people is paramount to keeping them aware of business activities and ensuring that your corporate culture stays alive. It's vital to keep your employees informed about the business's state and how it might affect them.

Depending on your business's size, consider creating a communications plan that provides employees and other stakeholders with regular updates on the actions you may be taking. Remember that any significant or severe disruption or change to your operations must be explained in detail to all affected parties before it happens, if possible.

5. Explore and implement strategies

Now that all research is complete, you and your recovery team are ready to draft a realistic, actionable continuity plan. The plan itself should include everything from the points above and the budget and timeline of the plan. Identify proactive strategies that can be put in place now to prevent any further impact from the crisis and reactive strategies that can be

implemented as soon as your current situation changes.

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