

## Plan in advance for remote control

Andrew Middlehurst says business continuity plans and policies must be devised and tested before the worst happens

Written by [Andrew Middlehurst](#)  
[CRN](#), 18 Feb 2010



Middlehurst: Business continuity plans won't work if not laid in advance

It has become something of a running joke that when the first flakes of snow fall, everything else stops. Throughout December and January parts of the UK ground to a standstill. Some estimates claimed that one in five people stayed away from the office.

This causes obvious problems for [businesses](#), but service-based organisations can be particularly affected.

It takes hours of hard work to examine the disruptive potential of certain scenarios, and to devise a coping mechanism, but bad weather can give you an opportunity to test the effectiveness of your policies.

The whole point of [business continuity](#) planning is to ensure the main parts of the business can keep going in difficult circumstances. Core functions must carry on even when staff do not come to work. When employees work from home, your service desk may be unable to offer support.

Customers should not have to speak to an answering machine when their network is experiencing difficulties, and a speedy response is mandated in many service level agreements (SLAs).

[Remote access](#) can help maintain a decent level of service. A system that diverts unanswered calls to workers' mobile phones is essential. Although not in the office, staff should be able to log calls and incidents to the network using remote access, and be able to assign engineers at home to deal with any problems.

The aim should be for customers to receive exactly the same service as if staff were in the office. Sales, engineering, contracts and purchasing staff should be able to operate from home with no discernable drop in productivity.

If each employee has remote access to company servers, they should still be able to provide quotes and respond to customer queries.

However, engineers may not reach customer sites when required, and this is where determination and persistence can sometimes replace planning. In the recent bad weather, one of our own engineers battled through the snow to attend an incident in Wales only to be stranded there when finished.

Working to ensure customers do not suffer is time well spent. Planning must include thorough consultation and testing.

Organisations affected by the recent bad weather can learn from the experience: what did they do well? And what could be improved in future? This evaluation should go hand in hand with testing as a priceless asset in the drive for complete business continuity.

And now is the time to act, because when the bad news comes it is usually too late.

*Andrew Middlehurst is technical support specialist at [Networks First](#)*