

TOURISM & MORE'S "TOURISM TIDBITS"

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Developing a Tourism Continuity Plan

This is one edition of Tourism Tidbits that you hopefully will never need, but definitely want to keep. No matter how good your risk management may be, the bottom line is that from time to time bad things do happen. No matter what we do, natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes occur, people get sick, a crime happens or a terrorism attack comes at the most unlikely place and at the least expected times. When these unforeseen circumstances happen, it is essential to have developed a tourism continuity plan. No two tourism destinations or attractions are totally alike and therefore perhaps the first thing to remember about a good continuity plan is that it must be tailored-made to fit your particular circumstance. Do not simply use someone else's or a boilerplate plan. What may work in one location may simply not work in another location. Understanding this need for individualization, please consider the following ideas

-Tourism is about being caring and concerned. Therefore any tourism continuity plan must put people first. If your plan is only focused on keeping your business going without thinking about both the business' needs and your visitors needs, then the plan will be only half complete.

-Bad things do happen. Take the time to think about your worse case scenarios. If you could not operate your business, how long would you survive? What financial obligations will you have to meet, even if no one walks through the door or comes to visit your community. What would you do if your employees take sick, or transportation services to your locale were to cease?

-Have a written continuity plan that is understandable to others. Many managers assume that they will be the one to hold their business or tourism local together in case of emergency. The problem is that managers and tourism executives are also people and things can also happen to them. Write out as much as possible and make sure that you leave the plan in an easily accessible place.

-Review your plan with your insurance agent. There may be a whole host of insurance options that can insure continuity for a very low cost. While an insurance policy cannot provide 100% protection, having the right insurance may mean the difference between continuity and bankruptcy.

-Review this plan on a regular basis. No matter how good your continuity plan may be, as soon as you have written it, assume that it is already outdated. Tourism is one of the least static businesses; it is always in a constant state of change. This means that your business continuity plan must be examined on a regular basis and keep up to

date as much as possible.

-Be creative in your business plan. Make sure that you think not only about all sorts of things that could go wrong, but also remember that in tourism we will have to maintain our sense of hospitality both during and after the crisis. Thus you will need to not only think about your internal communications system, but how your guests will communicate with their friends and relatives during the crisis. Ask yourself how you will feed people, what special needs will visitors have and how you may have to deal with people who speak a foreign language.

-Remember that tourism is as much about perceptions as facts. That means that as part of your continuity plan, you must have a media information plan. The media can paint a story with a positive or negative spin. Should the media portray your locale in a negative light; then they can make your business recuperation much more difficult. To guard against that potential, incorporate your guests into the continuity plan so that they become your allies rather than your foes.

-Determine where your continuity weak points are and be ready to deal with these issues before all else fails. Every locale has several weak points. It may be a road network, the fact that the airport is close to the sea or vulnerable to a breach of security, it may be that hotel food services are not up to par or that there is insufficient medical attention in your community. Know these weak points and think how you will continue should a disaster occur.

-Make sure everyone knows what his or her role is, and how to replace at least one other player should that be necessary. A crisis is not the time to hold philosophical discussions; there needs to be one person in charge who gives the orders and has an overall view of the situation. Prior to developing a continuity plan, players should be invited to speak their minds, but once the plan needs to go into action, second guessing becomes counter productive. On the other hand, all participants in a continuity plan are liable to not be able to perform, for any number of reasons. Therefore protect the plan by creating player redundancies, if one person cannot assume the responsibility then there is a back-up person to fill his or her shoes.

-Understand the importance of "redundancy". Redundancy is having multiple plans in place so that if for some reason, one back-up system does not work, there is a second one to back-up the back-up system. Redundancy systems not only work as an insurance policy but also help to lower the chances of fear and panic. Guests need to know that the local authorities are in control, have a plan and have taken the time to care not only about property and profits but also about them.