



Communications Sector Group

Warrnambool Factsheet – Small businesses

Do your disaster and business continuity plans consider the impacts of a prolonged telecommunications outage?

Telecommunications have become embedded in our everyday lives. Many small businesses and their customers now rely on telecommunications for the delivery of efficient and modern services.

Despite the importance and increased reliance on telecommunications service, recent telecommunications outages (see case study below) have shown that many small businesses do not properly plan for prolonged outages. Proper disaster and business continuity planning will assist your business to continue to operate during such outages.

Well prepared businesses should be able to answer the following five questions:

- 1. Do you have a continuity plan in place in the event of a telecommunications outage?**
- 2. Would your organisation be able to manage its customers and staff without telecommunications?**
- 3. Can your organisation provide adequate protections to the safety and wellbeing of staff if telecommunications are unavailable?**
- 4. Is your organisation able to fall back on manual processing for administrative systems such as payroll?**
- 5. Have you discussed the implications of a prolonged telecommunications outage with your telecommunications service providers?**

Warrnambool exchange fire case study

On 22 November 2012, a fire damaged Telstra's exchange in Warrnambool. This exchange acts as a transmission hub for telecommunications connectivity in the region. This left several communities and more than 100,000 people in South West Victoria without fixed-line telecommunications services. The outage lasted for up to three weeks.

The extended loss of telecommunications services in the Warrnambool region highlighted the important role they play in facilitating economic and social activities in Australian communities.

An Australian Government inquiry into the event found that many local businesses had not considered large scale or prolonged telecommunications outages in their business continuity plans. Many businesses that failed to plan for such outages suffered significant financial losses.

The inquiry found that the outage caused a number of economic concerns for local businesses including lost customers, increased operating costs, damaged reputations and reduced business activity. This was particularly evident for businesses that relied on telecommunications services to take bookings, place and receive orders, send and pay invoices and access banking services.

Many tourist operators in the region rely on telecommunications for bookings made both online and over the phone. Regional businesses had to develop response arrangements 'on the fly' during the outage. For example, a motel operator in Portland placed a notice on its website advising customers of the difficulties and provided a mobile number as an alternative contact during the outage.

Further information:

- www.communications.gov.au/telephone_services/warrnambool_inquiry
- www.business.gov.au
- www.disasterassist.gov.au