

Preparing small businesses for a telecommunications outage

Telstra's major mobile network failure this week reminds us just how important it is to have a backup plan for our telecommunications.

As we rely more heavily on telecommunications to do business, it is important to develop [a Business Continuity Plan](#) for future loss of services. You need a plan for all your services: mobile, landline, broadband and any systems that rely on telecommunications networks such as EFTPOS terminals and security monitoring. You could be faced with a complete telecommunications outage from a natural disaster or another partial outage like the Telstra one that we experienced on 9 February, 2016.

Be prepared! Make a short list of critical business activities that would be affected by such an outage. Decide in advance how critical these activities are to your business – this will help you to decide how much you would be prepared to spend on alternative means of communications, such as a mobile phone with a different provider.

You should also perform a Risk Assessment – how likely is it that a particular type of event will occur? If it's low, say once every five years, but the impact is very high, for example you lose \$15,000 worth of productivity like one case [cited in the news](#), then you know how much you could spend over the intervening months to avoid the worst consequences of an outage.

Using this week's Telstra outage as an example, a mobile small business using credit card facilities, a mobile phone for booking jobs and ordering materials and relying on online maps for directions between jobs might plan to:

- Keep a paper based slider machine or some 'authorisation for payment' forms in their vehicle.
- Use a SMS broadcast, their website, email or social media to let their customers know their alternative contact details.
- Have half of the staff's phones provided by one mobile phone provider and the rest by another one.
- Keep a prepaid phone with a different provider.
- Keep a street directory in their vehicle.

The important thing is to have a plan. It might be that after doing your risk assessment you decide you don't need to, or can't afford to do anything, but at least you decide that from a position of having thought about it in advance.