

## **The Role of Technology in Planning for a Pandemic**

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Many organizations have asked me if it is really necessary to plan for an Avian Flu pandemic. After all, the disease has not widely spread and human infections have been few and non-existent in the Americas. My response is that developing an Avian Flu response plan as part of the organization's overall business continuity program is both necessary and prudent. While human infections have been limited so far, the disease is spreading and will eventually reach North America then spread through Central and South America most likely following the migratory routes of wild birds or possibly through the importation of infected birds. Does this mean that the Avian Flu will become a risk to humans and result in a pandemic? Not necessarily but if it does, the results can be catastrophic. Beyond the human toll, most businesses will suffer through the absence or death of key personnel, reduced income, stock price declines, and other losses. At best, planning for the possibility will encourage organizations to update and perhaps re-evaluate their business continuity programs so that they will become more resilient against any unexpected event. So the question is how best to start.

Several government and health organizations have issued guidelines on developing response plans. These include:

U.S. Government Official Pandemic Website	<a href="http://www.pandemicflu.gov">http://www.pandemicflu.gov</a>
UK Department of Health	<a href="http://www.dh.gov.uk">http://www.dh.gov.uk</a>
World Health Organization (WHO)	<a href="http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pandemic/">http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pandemic/</a>

The basic premise typically starts with the identification of a planning/response team. Information Technology is one of the critical members that must be represented. Technology is a part of the day-to-day environment and can either be an asset or an obstacle.

For planning purposes, one of the common themes is to allow employees to work from home. While some work can be accomplished through basic E-mail, remote access provides greater capabilities. However, although remote access has become more common over the past decade, is not yet ubiquitous and many organizations have not

invested in the technology. Furthermore, not all employees have remote access or can work off-site. In addition, securing data from unauthorized use is always a concern.

Information Technology is also typically responsible for telephones and toll free numbers.

Laptops

Other areas of concern for technology managers is the potential loss of key personnel,

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