

[Is your business prepared for a blackout?](#)

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Is your business prepared for a blackout?

Power outages and blackouts are rare in the UK, but you never know when a site may lose or reduce power.

Categories Technology Consulting, Business Consulting, Business Resilience, Project Management

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While sitting at home with a candle and a blanket could conjure an almost romantic image, have you considered what an unlikely, but still possible, power blackout could mean for – and do to - your business?

Reliance on electricity

Look on your desk – how many electrical devices do you see? In the office, how is electricity used at desks? In the canteen? To get in and out of the building? And, how reliant are you on electricity to manufacture your product, or provide your service?

In an ever more technical world, we rely on electricity for almost everything – from communicating to manufacturing, making payments to opening doors, but we're fortunate to live in a world where it is readily available and protected. Right?

Causes of blackouts

The main narrative surrounding blackouts at the moment is largely around the Government conducting – and practicing for – planned outages if the country is unable to import enough gas and/or electricity from continental Europe in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

These suggested three-hour rolling power cuts are the first time such measures have been considered since the 'three-day week' in the 1970s, with UK businesses potentially finding themselves unable to keep critical systems running – or even the lights on – at times during the winter.

But while planned outages are unlikely, the National Grid will be running close to maximum capacity and an incident that otherwise would be minor, could cause significant overloads – therefore unplanned outages.

Take the [August 2003 blackout in North Eastern US and Canada](#) for example. A series of three otherwise innocuous events, three trees and a computer bug is all it took to leave 50 million people without power for up to a whole day, to cause upwards of \$10 billion damage, contribute to almost 100 deaths.

Preparing for a blackout

Portable gas hob, tin of beans and a torch. If only.

There are two angles to your preparations – operations and IT. Many will consider the former, but neglect the latter, assuming generators will kick in, or simply forgetting about it. It's always there and always running so it's natural to think that it won't be impacted.

There are a lot of questions to ask yourself, your teams and your board, and we've listed just some below, but the main things are:

1. Check your UPS's

Have they been tested recently? How much run time do they have? How old are the batteries?

2. What's the plan for the servers?

How are they being shut down? How are they being secured? Who is assigned the task – and who's the backup?

3. Temperature check

How will you keep vital equipment hot/cool to maintain your operation and remove risk of damaging hardware?

4. How up to speed are your staff?

Do they know the business continuity plan? Is it accessible offline? Do they know where hardware and literal buttons are if needed?

Regardless of length, a blackout can have a catastrophic impact on your business, and therefore your brand, revenue and team.

Don't be caught out – ask yourself these questions. If you need support to develop your plans, understand need, or even have a second set of eyes to guide you, our team of experts is here to do just that.

Contact us at info@waterstons.com or call 0345 094 0945 asking for Mike Pemberton.

- Are you prepared for zero warning power outages?

- What is the minimum warning required for the business to respond to a planned power outage?
- Have UPS's been checked whether they can hold long enough to power down servers, or spin up generators (including time to resolve issues with generators not starting, running out of fuel etc)
- What is the age of the UPS batteries? Do they need replacing?
- Have the UPSs been tested under load to confirm their stated duration is accurate?
- Is there a plan for shutting down servers in a clean manner?
- Is this automatic, has it been tested?
- Will servers power back on automatically after power is restored?
- Is there a manual process to bring critical business applications? Is this documented and tested?
- In the case of data corruption due to unclean power down, are you confident in your backups?
- Can users continue working while the office or server room is offline?
- If generators are already in place, is there a seamless automatic switchover if power is lost?
- Have the generators been tested?
- Are the generators fuelled, or will there be a delay getting fuel?
- What are the run times of the fuel tank for the generator? Is this sufficient to last for example a working day?
- Can the generator be refuelled while running?
- Are there plans for generator hire in place?
- Do those plans allow for competition when trying to hire a generator (as other companies will likely also be affected)?
- Are load requirements already calculated?
- Has the means of connecting the generator been planned?
- Are the cooling requirements for the server room already covered by the UPS/Generator?
- Are there any other comms cabinets around the site required for operation of the business that also need including in the UPS/Generator?
- Would staff be encouraged to come to the office or work from home during a power outage, assuming the servers and network remain operational?
- If so, is there enough capacity in the generator to support heating, water pumps etc?
- Are there any rooms using for example magnet locks and swipe cards? Will these fail secure (i.e. lock) if power is lost, or do doors go into 'free swing'?
- Do you have any lifts in the premises? In the case of planned power loss this will need disabling ahead of the outage.
- In the case of unplanned power loss, where there is a real risk of power loss, you may need to consider lift use.
- Is the emergency phone in the lift battery backed? Does it rely on your network or other systems being powered up?
- If the server room cannot be powered, are there plans in place to communicate to staff about the situation (bearing in mind any HR systems or data may also be inaccessible during the power outage)?
- Is the Business Continuity Plan printed and accessible by the required staff?
- Do you or your staff know where the fuses / breakers are?

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