

SPACE INVADERS: GLASGOW'S SPH SURVIVES WORKPLACE DISASTER

Specialised Data Centre allows fire-hit business to continue without interruption

When fire broke out in the hi-tech premises of Glasgow-based SPH Property Search two weeks ago, the disaster could easily have forced the fast-growing company out of business.

But the drama didn't become a crisis...because SPH had taken out an unusual form of insurance. It meant that within minutes of the blaze it was up and running again, just as fast, just as smart.

No records were lost, no deadlines were missed, no clients were inconvenienced.

For SPH, it was very much business as usual, because its entire workforce quickly re-located across the city to Campbell Lee's Data Centre in Springburn where work continued without missing a beat.

And in so doing, they became the first company to use the Data Centre's new purpose-built Business Continuity suite opened two months ago by TV personality Viv Lumsden and local MSP Patricia Ferguson.

Now, two weeks after the blaze, SPH are moving to new premises and can reflect on what might have been. They survived the disaster and, according to Managing Director Ronnie Park, clients didn't even notice there had been a problem!

"The fire started in an air conditioning unit and caused lots of smoke damage to our St George's Road premises. Fortunately our computer room was unaffected, so we quickly removed all our servers and files, phoned the Data Centre, and told them to expect visitors.



"They had the Business Continuity suite ready for us in minutes, we got our people over there, we invaded their space, plugged in the hardware, and hit the ground running. From PCs to faxes, coffee machines and toilets, the Data Centre became our new home for a fortnight.

"It really was business as usual - just from a different location."

SPH Property Search is an innovative company providing accurate and cost-effective conveyancing search services for solicitors and their clients across the UK. It has supplied over 300,000 Local Authority searches in Scotland since its inception in 1992 and now covers over 90% of all properties in Scotland.

It has recently expanded into England with support from investors 3i and the Bank of Scotland.

Originating as a firm of professional Town Planners, Stirrat Park Hogg diversified at the request of Conveyancing Solicitors frustrated by the high price and poor service offered by Local Authorities in the provision of Property Enquiry Certificates.

Campbell Lee Internet Solutions Managing Director Chris Brown says SPH's business continuity foresight is very unusual.

"The reality is that 92% of Scottish businesses have no disaster recovery plan in place. But fortunately for SPH, they had, and their business continued as if nothing had happened. But for many other businesses, it could have been curtains."

Chris says Disaster Recovery is a broad term that means many things to different people.

"You may think that you have enough contingency plans to cope with such an event, but the harsh reality of dealing with the after-effects of a fire or a flood can be very different. Even the loss of computer data - through software corruption or hardware theft - can prove fundamentally devastating to modern business."



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He argues that, through careful risk assessment, preventive measures and contingency planning, the chances of disaster overtaking a business can be dramatically reduced.

"It has been proven that in the event of disaster, informed actions based on a properly researched business continuity plan - especially when supported with skilled restoration techniques - can enable you to resume commercial viability within hours, and ensure that your customers remain your customers."

Brown adds: "Bear in mind that there are hidden costs to disaster. The effort required to resume your business may far exceed the effort it would have required to create a Business Continuity Plan. And, it is never possible to predict the effects a disaster will have on your professional reputation.

"SPH are our first space invaders, but we're delighted that they did invade our space and use it to keep their business going. Their survival shows the wisdom of prudent disaster planning. It's a message other companies, less well prepared, should heed."

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