

Have a disaster recovery plan ready

SMALL BUSINESS

The Associated Press

Many small-business owners whose companies were hit by Hurricane Florence are embarking on an uncertain path to recovery.

While these owners are still trying to assess the damage to their companies, and what they'll get from their insurers, they also need to reach out to customers, vendors and employees to maintain those relationships. They need to see whether they're capable of getting the business running again, even on a limited basis.

And with the Atlantic hurricane season running through Nov. 30 and memories of super-storm Sandy still fresh on Long Island, local small businesses would do well to update their preparedness plans.



AP / SEAN RAYFORD

A simple statement of hours of operation, for example, can help get customers back, experts say.

Here are three things owners need to know about recovering from a disaster:

■ **Be ready to communicate:** Small-business owners might find themselves waiting and wondering how bad the damage is. Storms like Florence and last year's Hurricane Harvey can linger for days and cause se-

vere flooding, making a quick assessment difficult.

But even when owners are in limbo, they should be prepared to take steps to help the business survive. Have a plan to contact customers and vendors to inform them of your plans to reopen. If possible, a sign on a store saying, "We'll be back" can help. Employees should be reassured that the boss intends to get them back to work — but an owner also needs to be honest if a recovery will be prolonged or uncertain.

Owners also should think about how their businesses might change in response to the disaster. While Matt Stephens, who evacuated to Atlanta before Florence made landfall, waited to hear how his Wilmington, North Carolina, financial planning business fared, he prepared himself and colleagues at The Wealth Plan Co. for clients' post-storm needs. Instead of investments, he expected them to be asking about recovery help.

"I'm doing some research now about [Federal Emergency Management Agency] grants, disaster loans, and claiming flood insurance so I'll be prepared to advise clients in the aftermath," he said. His company was able to keep operating because its evacuated staffers have laptops in hand and all their data stored online.

■ **Get customers back ASAP:** Toby Cahoon's pest control company in Holly Ridge, North Carolina, was ready to return to work despite some damage to its building, but flooding and downed trees and power lines prevented staffers from getting to many customers. And B&T Pest Control's services were in demand because rain and floodwaters bring out bugs and pests.

Cahoon contacted customers — those who had working phones or email — and assured them they'd get service as soon as streets were safe. In the meantime, he said, "we will start servicing some customers in the

areas we can get to and increase that service area as we are able."

Getting back to work as soon as possible, even in limited circumstances, can save a company following a disaster. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, many companies in parts of New Orleans that were spared from flooding discovered their customers weren't so lucky and had fled. Some companies were able to recover; like Cahoon, they did what work they could.

■ **Line up help in advance:** If you expect severe damage, it might pay to line up contractors and building supplies beforehand; otherwise you could be tempted to sign up the first contractor you can reach.

Don't do that, suggests Jack Plaxe, owner of Security Consulting Alliance, a company that advises business on disaster preparation and recovery.

"Talk to them, vet them," he says. "The last thing you want to do is hire a contractor who can't do the job."

THE ISSUE: PARENTING

Don't go into debt for nonessentials

MONEY FIX

BY SHERYL NANCE-NASH
Special to Newsday

Who wouldn't argue that children come first? But some parents are getting this twisted.

More than 50 percent of parents have gone into unnecessary debt to buy their kids nonessential items or experiences, according to a new online survey of 1,000 people by CreditKarma.com. More than 1 in 4 said they overspent because they were either afraid of being judged by friends or other parents, or because they didn't want their kids judged by peers.

Come on, mom and dad. ■ **Be realistic:** "Focus more on your children's needs rather than their wants. Avoid getting caught up in what others are doing," says Leslie Tayne, a debt resolution attorney with the Tayne Law

Group in Melville.

■ **Get over guilt:** Have an open and honest discussion with your kids about what you can afford. "You may not be able to swoop them off to some extravagant place or buy them the latest smartphone, but you can still do fun, affordable things together," Tayne says.

■ **Stay strong:** Remember you are also an educator and leader. "Years from now your child will remember how you always talked about buying a second-hand car because it is more cost-efficient than buying a new one. They will forget the expensive items you purchased for them. Or worse, that is what they remember and will duplicate the behavior," says Lou Cannataro, partner at Cannataro Park Avenue Financial in Manhattan.

He adds: "Don't sacrifice long-term financial stability for short-term success in giving your child nonessential items and experiences now. Your child's appreciation will diminish quickly for nonessential purchases for they were just that — nonessential."

THE WEEK AHEAD

For more events, visit newsday.com

MONDAY

NAVIGATING GIG ECONOMY | Greenlawn

A career counselor explores how the gig economy works, focusing on strategies that you can use to become part of working "gigs" rather than traditional jobs, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Harborfields Library, 31 Broadway, free, register, harborfieldslibrary.org, 631-757-4200.

JOB SKILLS 101 | Sayville

Learn the skills you need to land your dream job, including how to write a resume and cover letter, common interview questions and answers, do's and don'ts using LinkedIn and Indeed.com, 7-8:30 p.m., Sayville Library, 88 Greene Ave., free, register, sayvillelibrary.org, 631-589-4440.

TUESDAY

COMPLIMENTARY MEMBER AND SPONSOR APPRECIATION RECEPTION | Melville

Financial Executives International (FEI) Long Island Chapter hosts a complimentary cocktail reception for members, qualified prospective members, sponsors and prospective sponsors, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Blackstone Steakhouse, 10 Pinelawn Rd., free, register, financialexecutives.org, 973-765-1000.

SCORE BUSINESS COUNSELING | Centereach

Counseling and mentoring to help small businesses form, grow and succeed, presented by SCORE, 4-7 p.m., Middle Country Public Library, 101 Eastwood Blvd., free, must register for an appointment, mcplibrary.org, 631-585-9393 ext. 133.

EZ SPEAKERS TOASTMASTERS | Hauppauge

Learn how to become a public speaker, practice and

learn skills by filling a meeting role, guests welcome, 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., H. Lee Dennison Building, 100 Veterans Memorial Hwy., free, suffolkcountynyny.gov, 631-375-7407.

WEDNESDAY

LETIP BUSINESS NETWORKING | Bohemia

New members looking to grow their businesses welcome, 7:01-8:31 a.m., Airport Diner, 3760 Veterans Memorial Hwy., no cost for meal, call to reserve, letipbohemia.com, 631-281-6200.

WORDPRESS 102 | Farmingdale

"Adding, Creating and Managing Content," a follow-up to the WordPress 101 course, covers adding content to your WordPress website, working with the media library and more, 9-11 a.m., Small Business Development Center, Farmingdale State College, 2350 Broadhollow Rd., \$10, advance registration required, includes coffee, farmingdale.edu/sbdc, 934-420-2765.

FRIDAY

BUSINESS SUCCESS SEMINAR | Mineola

"How to Take Your Business From Good to Great," learn about secrets to a highly profitable and rapidly-growing business, check-in and networking at 8:15 a.m., seminar 8:30-10:30 a.m., Launchpad, 55 Mineola Blvd., free, registration is required, michaelbreitman.actioncoach.com/events, 516-801-6452 ext. 1.

— GINA TABARUS

SEND NOTICES to Business Calendars, Newsday Events, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250; fax 631-843-2688, or email events@newsday.com