

Prepare For Business Unusual This South African Winter

South African businesses heavily-relevant on realtime telecoms links for their bread and butter need to start squirreling away redundant capacity forthwith.

That's the message from leading independent telco Hugenet Networks, now incorporating Otel, as autumn sets in. One senior opposition party politician was quoted in Parliament last month as saying that load-shedding is "imminent".

"It's no longer a case of being hopeful. The situation is dire, it's going to get worse in winter and company directors could be breaching their fiduciary duties by not coming up with Plan B," says Rad Jankovic, Hugenet Networks Commercial Director. South Africa's general business and political climate suggests that contingency planning is not misplaced.

Businesses also need to be aware of the fact that contingency planning must be implemented with due consideration for sensitive IT and telecoms equipment. Constant power outages and fluctuations can damage an organisation's hardware as well as adversely impact on its ability to properly conduct business.

The majority of local firms that depend on telecoms links to do business are simply not going to get away any longer with not bringing in back-up power capacity. Forget asking the question 'do I purchase a generator?', now the question becomes 'what size of generator do I purchase and will it be enough to cope with load-shedding in Winter 2019?' says Mr Jankovic.

He emphasizes: "It's business unusual this winter, thanks to Eskom. Unfortunately, this means that telecoms consumers also need to be somewhat accommodating with their networks over the coming months. Even though ICT firms are generally amongst the first to install redundant capacity, IT and telecoms networks will go down as UPS systems are exhausted, batteries run dry and generators splutter their last after prolonged outages."

"Telcos will probably take longer than usual to get back to clients during load-shedding, performance might not quite be up to that specified in pre-loadshedding SLAs, but rest assured, we're all still there working furiously to keep South Africa connected," he adds.

It's not all doom and gloom, says Mr Jankovic. "There are several proven ways to keep the power on when the lights go out and the trick for South African business over this winter will be to deploy a mix of Eskom-proofing strategies and tactics."

Mr Jankovic listed six pieces of easily-available hardware that local business can deploy to reduce the impact of load-shedding this winter:

Generator

The size of generator you'll need depends on your electrical requirements. Generators can be mobile or fixed. Mobile units can be bought at most home or building stores - just be sure to phone around ahead of time as demand might be high. Take an inventory of your most vital electrical appliances when you speak to an expert so that they can suggest the right option for your business.

UPS

An Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) works both as a back-up battery for your computer and regulates the amount of power it receives. As soon as the power switches off, the UPS switches on. In short, it makes sure that your equipment performs a proper shutdown until you then connect to a generator, preventing, for example, data corruption.

Surge protection

There are various devices available to protect your electrical equipment from surges - when the supply voltage fluctuates. The most cost effective ones look like multi-plugs and let you plug multiple components into one power outlet. During loadshedding the quality of supply is unpredictable. Large fluctuations in supply voltage can damage electronic equipment.

Back up your data

If your business is computer-based, it's crucial to back up your data often and to put measures in place to keep your data safe. The last thing you want is to lose files or work you've done during this time.

Back-up batteries

Be sure to keep your laptop and smartphone charged before the power goes off. Alternatively, invest in battery packs or even solar-powered charging solutions.

Solar-powered solutions

There are many solar-powered options to power your electrical gear, charge your cellphone and laptop or provide much-needed lighting. You could also go off the grid completely by swapping electrical power for solar power. However this can be a costly exercise and might not be suitable to all businesses.