Keep Your Small Business Safe With A Disaster Plan

(NAPSA)—Your small business is your life. It represents not just a significant investment of time and energy—and, of course, money—but also passion, dedication and hard work. That's why you want to devote as much effort to protecting it as you did to creating it in the first place.

According to the National Archives & Records Administration, 93 percent of companies that had trouble restoring their data after a disaster were out of business within 18 months. It's not just a hurricane, fire or flood that can ruin a business; it can be a hard drive that unexpectedly crashes or an important document that is misplaced. Businesses, especially small businesses, are frequently born of vision, dedication and good old-fashioned hard work. That means that in the day-to-day building of a business, preparing for the worst is often overlooked or put on hold for more pressing matters.

With today's technology and tools, keeping a business safe doesn't have to be a difficult or time-consuming process. That's why HP and SCORE are holding a series of disaster recovery workshops for small businesses across the United States.

"HP understands the unique needs that small businesses have, and we are excited to be working with SCORE to provide insight on how to prepare for disasters large and small," said Lisa Baker, Director of Small and Medium Business—Americas, Personal Systems Group, HP.

Additionally, they have created a few simple tips to keep your business safe with a little advance planning.

Small businesses can be just as vulnerable as bigger ones, so it's important to have a disaster preparedness plan.

• **Identify what is critical to your business.** Take a look around and identify what is critical to the business. This could be everything from tax documents to customer databases to computer files. Based on hardware failures, theft, malicious acts, mistakes or natural disasters, determine what critical elements of the business need to be protected.

• **Create a communications plan.** Create a plan to keep things running if something should happen to the business. In the event of an emergency, how will employees know whether or not to report to work? Is the business equipped for employees to work remotely by accessing e-mail and files online? Create a plan and assign roles and responsibilities as a part of that plan. Update the plan and walk through it with employees on a routine basis.

• **Safeguard critical business data by backing up.** Have a plan in place to access important business data should disaster strike. Back up critical data, or even all data, on a regular basis so that you have a copy of the data. Bear in mind that if the backup system involves records (such as tapes) that are stored at the physical business, in the event of a fire or flood, all files may be lost. Affordable options for backing up data off-site or online are worth investigating. Additionally, test your backup system to ensure proper performance and understand how the information can easily and rapidly be retrieved.

• **Protect data and networks against viruses, worms and hackers.** Viruses and other malicious online risks are very real threats to any business and can result in days of unproductive downtime. To ensure network and operating systems are secure, investigate available software, servers and services that detect new viruses immediately and can shut down infected machines before they cripple an entire business. At a minimum, it is recommended that a firewall, anti-virus and anti-spam systems are in place to secure critical data.

• **Document assets for insurance needs.** Take photos of all office furniture, equipment and layout, and photocopy or scan in all critical documents including insurance policies, tax documents and legal contracts for insurance purposes. With digital photos, you can even keep archived copies off-site. If a major disaster strikes and completely destroys the office, it would be easy to submit an insurance claim and have minimal disruption to your business.

The best approach for security and business protection is to be prepared and to have a plan. Spend a few moments to ensure the long-term success of the business. It's a worthwhile investment.