

Business survival guide during load shedding

Eskom has announced the return of stage 2 load shedding due to a broken coal conveyor belt at Medupi and boiler tube leaks at five electricity generating units. It's uncertain how long this latest round of load shedding will last, but it serves as a reminder that every business owner and manager need to factor an unreliable power supply into its business plan.



South Africa's economy lost an estimated R12bn during three days of stage 4 load shedding in March earlier this year, with smaller businesses among the worst affected by the power outages. However, you can mitigate some of the effects of load shedding through a range of solutions, some of them cheap and simple, some complex and expensive.

Pieter Bensch, executive vice president for Africa & Middle East at Sage provides some suggestions about how small businesses to survive:

1. Plan around the schedule

Planning is critical in the battle against load shedding. The [EskomSePush](#) app can help you stay up to date as it provides push notifications to mobile devices. Also, be sure to follow Eskom or your municipal provider on social media for load shedding news alerts: on Twitter, [@Eskom_SA](#), [@CityPowerJhb](#) and [@CityofCT](#), for example.

You can mitigate the impact of load shedding by asking people to work at home or rescheduling jobs, as long as you know when it will hit your area.

2. Adopt flexible working hours and allow people to work remotely

When load shedding hits one of the major cities, your employees may arrive at work late after fighting their way through gridlocked traffic, then sit around in the dark for up to four and a half hours.

Why not allow people who can do their work via the internet to work at home rather than coming into the office when it's your turn to be load-shed? This way, productivity can continue, and your team don't have to wait until the power is back on.

Many people in services businesses or in supporting corporate roles can do their work from anywhere, provided they have an internet connection. This may require you to change some of your processes and management policies - but the benefits to workers and business can be significant.

Load shedding aside, growing traffic and rising real-estate costs mean that remote working is becoming a more attractive option for many small businesses.

3. Adopt cloud-based business solutions

One of the best ways to ensure that your business remains productive throughout this period of load shedding is to embrace cloud-based business solutions.

If you use online software rather than on-premise software, you can work anywhere you have access to an internet connection. Your team will simply be able to log into your accounting software or customer relationship management software or productivity tools at home or from the nearest hotspot or even using mobile data, without depending on a PC or a server in the office. The latest data and work will be available to your people from their tablets, smartphone or notebooks without you needing to worry about doing backups.



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4 Sep 2019



4. Regular backups

Keep your latest data backed up so that you won't lose hours of work or any important information when the power goes out. Regular data backups are a must, not only because of load shedding; they can also be a lifesaver if your hard drive crashes or your computers are stolen.

For a small business, simply using a cloud-based storage and backup solution like Dropbox or Microsoft's OneDrive can be a lifesaver.

These cloud storage and backup solutions allow you to keep online copies of every document you work on. But it can also be a good idea to back your data up to an external physical hard drive, just in case you need it urgently and don't have access to the Internet.

If you use cloud-based tools and applications, you will generally not need to worry about backing up data such as accounting and payroll records.

5. Invest in uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) for your PCs as well as any network hubs or switches

Not every small business can afford the cost of high-end alternative energy solutions such as installing generators or solar-powered batteries. But there are other options.

A UPS will give users time to exit the applications they are working on and save their work before they safely shut down their PCs if there is a power failure. Even if you have generators, they'll take a few seconds to kick in after a power failure – a UPS will prevent them from losing power before you've saved your work.

A backup power inverter system is another option. For less than R10,000 you can find one that will keep your routers, a couple of computers and some lights going for a few hours. Mobile data networks are congested and sometimes reliable when the power goes down, so powering your ADSL or fibre with an alternate power supply can be a big productivity booster.

6. Switch PCs off and unplug them when the lights go out

Power surges when electricity is restored after an outage may damage your hardware. To reduce the risk of damage to hardware, switch off your PCs and unplug them from the main power source.

7. Get a power bank

We all love our smartphones, but their battery life under heavy use is still not as great as we'd like it to be. A power bank can help you manage your business when there's load shedding. These portable chargers let you top up the battery of your USB-powered mobile devices so you can keep going when there's a long power outage.

This is especially helpful if your landlines go down when there's no power - at least, your mobile phone will be powered up and you'll be reachable. Power banks are also helpful if you're out and about for most of the day, and constantly find yourself out of battery power for your smartphone. At the same time, your smartphone can also be used as a mobile hotspot to connect to the internet.

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