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Prior to Hurricane Michael, our business was a rapidly growing company that provides services for digital marketing and IT solutions to a wide range of commercial and non-profit clients. My company was founded as a single person company in 2013 and we had grown to 12 employees over our three business units at the time of the storm.

Our business units are Aaron Rich Marketing, which specializes in digital marketing including website development, graphic design, social networking, and SEO. ARCITECHX is an IT consulting firm that supports small to medium businesses throughout the region with hardware/software, network administration and server management needs. Low Voltage Cabling Contractors is a limited energy specialty contractor and provides services for Ethernet, CCTV, audio, and other low voltage wiring in new and existing construction.

As a result of the growth we were experiencing, our needs in the prior months to the storm had led us to invest into an office in downtown Panama City that required a full renovation. Our business is often oriented to taking something that is unrefined and in need of help and the office that we found was no different. It was in perhaps the most blighted block of our downtown and the facility needed a reboot. One week before the storm, we handed our contractor the final punch list on our state of the art, fully renovated office space.

As we all are well aware, October 10<sup>th</sup> wreaked havoc across our region and decimated most of the structures within the city. I consider ourselves one of the lucky ones that we sustained lesser damage than many. Albeit that damage still included losing approximately 25% of our roof with damage across other parts of the roof, collapsed ceilings, significant loss of equipment, loss of fencing, downed trees, as well as other damage throughout the building.

Afterwards, my staff worked not just to secure their homes and family's needs, but my IT staff worked countless hours to try and restore businesses with temporary networks so that their businesses could have as much continuity as possible. Since it was uncharted territory from a technical standpoint many of the solutions had to be developed on the fly. Several of our clients we supported in this time were important in the storm response efforts including contractors, infrastructure-related organizations, and medical facilities.

As I soon found out, working through the insurance claim would be an arduous process. Without the capability to make phone calls and get internet connectivity, basic communication with the insurance companies was extremely prohibitive. Even once a basic level of communication was obtained weeks after the storm, it became clear that the insurance claim process would be a long-term fight.

Knowing what challenges were ahead, I had concerns for the financial wellbeing of my staff's families as well as my ability to retain those employees who were vital to the operation business. I run my business pretty conservatively and still I could see what was coming with the lack of income from unpaid A/R.

Some of my clients were out of business completely because their facilities were destroyed and some would be experiencing significant delays to regain operations. I still today carry an abnormal amount A/R but I have been able to manage it and retain all but one employee that has since been replaced.

After discussion of the SBA loan programs with a local SBA Specialist Johnny Branch and Len Eichler, I decided that we might be able to utilize the SBA loan program to help with the business restoration and working capital. While I had a fairly good understanding of what documentation was required from being a loan offer earlier in my career, I still found the loan application process to be extremely involved given the circumstances. Had I not had this career experience, I would have found the loan process to be quite intimidating. I can certainly see why some people in a disaster situation would just give up on the SBA loan program and go a different direction. Even gathering the information needed was difficult because some of the documentation required was lost in the storm when the office was damaged as well as having weeks of problems with internet connectivity. The window of opportunity for applying to these programs seemed to come and go too quickly. I do think that extending the application deadline relative to the level of disaster would be a reasonable approach. Disseminating information about the programs was difficult because of the lack of communications and then the application process being a lengthy one did not leave potential loan applicants much time to react.

I was however, able to work through the process and my wife and I eventually closed on the loan in Mid-December 2018 after putting our personal home and office as collateral. That was however, not the end of my issues in becoming whole as a business again. Prices for renovations were exponentially more than when we renovated a few months before the storm. For example, roofing quotes we received post-storm to pre-storm were over double the cost. Contractors were also getting backed up for months on projects, especially local contractors that people knew and trusted. Predatory contractors came into the marketplace and you started hearing horror stories about people being taken advantage of across town. Furthermore, I received a small disbursement from the SBA after the loan closing and did not receive an additional disbursement until early March 2019. By that time I had come out of pocket as much as possible but some repairs had to be delayed. We are still today awaiting completion on our non-essential repairs such as our back awning of our building and fencing, due to a backlog of contractor scheduling. If we were able to get SBA loan disbursement faster, our recovery would have most certainly been swifter. Our SBA advisor seemed to be helping us through the process and we immediately provided her with the necessary documentation throughout the process each time she requested, I believe it is just a tremendous amount of red tape that causes it to be slower than it should be.

In the end we were able to utilize the SBA loan funds to help us keep the business operational and it was a program that helped us to find relief in this difficult time. I certainly appreciate your willingness to discuss the SBA loan process and take to heart the constructive feedback we have as individuals who have been through the experience.