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BACKUP & SECURITY

Handling Disasters in Stride

Column: From the Trenches

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From the September 2009 Issue

No firm should be at risk when there are failures, large or small. Today's business continuity and disaster recovery services are affordable and easy to implement. Solutions are available to fit the needs of firms of all sizes, and there is certainly one or more that can fit your firm.

The most common failure issue will still be human errors, internal failures of hardware, or operational issues with software like viruses or failed upgrades. These day-to-day problems may cost you more than a catastrophic failure like fire or theft. Consider planning for normal day-to-day failures as well as the big events when you are doing your Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery (BC/DR) Planning. Let's look at some strategies to consider.

BACKUP AS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

Computers can and will fail. Hard drives, system boards, memory and other components

have a limited life. It is not a question of if they fail, but a matter of when they will fail. That is the reason most of us have both servers and workstations on routine replacement cycles. The disruption of an unscheduled failure can cost significant time, money, and a loss of data that is far more expensive

than the cost of a replacement unit and installation. We also usually get the additional benefit of greater speed when we upgrade our computers.

Backup technology has changed notably in the last few years. Backing up to tape drive and to removable disks still works, but it is far from the most reliable, cost effective or safest way to back up. If you have not reviewed your choices lately in backup, you are in for a surprise with the convenience of web-based backups either as a software-only solution or as a backup appliance.

YOUR COMMON BACKUP CHOICES INCLUDE:

- Web-based backup of files through a browser or locally loaded software
- Backup appliances that can copy files to an Internet hosting facility
- Hard drive backups
 - Removable disks – High Rely, USB NAS, etc.
 - SAN to SAN replication
- CDP (Continuous Data Protection) appliances
- Traditional Tape drives

There are many competitors in the web-based backup space with the cost of storage varying from 25 cents to five dollars per gigabyte with most falling in the \$2/gigabyte range. Common suppliers include the following: [Abacus](#), [eFolderBackup](#), [eVault](#), [Global Data Vault](#), [Iron Mountain](#), [NetRescue](#) and [ProtectYourDataNow](#).

A good example product in this category is Abacus. This solution has all of the key elements that we prefer in a web-based backup solution including, but not limited to, extensive security, speed, reliability, customer support and a reasonable price. For example, in security there are two levels of password protection, data is transferred and stored with 128-bit encryption, and the data is restricted by IP address.

The product is fast enough to back up 2 Terabytes of data daily, and has date filtering to version data for 20 years and more. The backup is fully automatic, can back up open files, can back up all major database formats, is replicated to multiple servers, is housed in Montreal, Canada, to help with jurisdictional issues and can do a Brick Level (= individual message) backup and restore for

Exchange. Customer support has extended hours, and the data is compressed highly before the charge per gigabyte is applied.

Alternatively, you may want to consider a backup appliance such as the NetRescue appliance or the [Xilocore](#)

appliance. Backup appliances make a backup of your data every few minutes (I have set my NetRescue appliance to backup my firm's data every 15 minutes), and you can maintain multiple versions of any file. Optionally, you can backup your data off-site every night or to another location that has an appliance.

An additional key advantage to the NetRescue appliance is the ability to run any server that fails on the appliance itself until the server repair can be completed.

For example, your Exchange mail server can be restarted on the appliance in eight to 12 minutes, and the end-users will have all email through the last copy of data, typically 15 minutes ago, and can run the Exchange server with no changes on their desktops or laptops. Running a server on the appliance is basically invisible to the end-user. When the failed server is repaired, the server running on the appliance can be restored to the real or virtual server.

The other methodologies listed earlier in this article have their advantages and disadvantages, but all are only backups of your data, which may copy your data to another site. Many of the methods require extensive restore times and could cause long interruptions in service. We recommended options three through five until 2007, but only use these methods in certain situations today.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY SERVICES

There are many providers of business continuity services in the North American market. Examples include Agility Solutions, IBM, Iron Mountain and SunGard. Our favorite example of this category of BC/DR solution is Agility Solutions. Agility responded to more than 400 disaster-related events in 2008 in 30 states, the District of Columbia and one Canadian province.

The types of disasters the company has handled include power outages, communications

failures, technology failures, construction issues, flooding, HVAC malfunctions, fires, lightning strikes, mold, rat infestation, worker strikes, hurricanes and ice storms. Consider what you would classify as a failure against this list.

Agility has mobile trailers of equipment that they can bring to your disaster recovery site, establish communications, and help make your computer and phone

systems run. Agility's mission is to handle any or all of the four key recovery elements within 48 hours of any interruption: Power, Technology, Space and Connectivity.

Some of their services are provided à la carte such as power generators, technology, space options — mobile, office, retail or phone re-direction. The basic contract is quite inexpensive, and we have seen many businesses preserved by their efforts. Agility's ReadySuite membership solution addresses the typical high-cost, high-frustration factor associated with business continuity planning and gives your firm immediate protection the day you become a member.

One additional capability we recommend is their MyAgility online planning resource. MyAgility gives you 24/7 online access to your customized recovery plan. They have quick access to popular tools and resources. They store critical documents and contact databases for easy communication via the Alert Notification System, and they also maintain a fixed-asset inventory database.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING TOOLS

We want all firms to have BC/DR plans, but this task is often bypassed as a project or given a low priority when time or money is constrained. BC/DR plans are not trivial to create, and if you are new to this area, you may want to get professional help or find the right expertise.

Alternatively, there are products like the MyAgility suite cited above, the Iron Mountain planning tool or another product we like in this category like Survivor or Statistic. These products provide the basic strategies and documents to help your team develop a BC/DR plan.

Even with the best of these tools, we think that training is certainly needed.

K2 Enterprises (www.k2e.com)

has developed an all-day BC/DR course for the CPE market for 2010 and beyond. This course is intended to take you from limited knowledge of BC/DR planning to a working plan using some of the best techniques available. We will include exposure on helpful strategies and products such as Abacus, NetRescue, Agility and more.

THE WORST CHOICE OF ALL IS DOING NOTHING

The choices listed above are affordable for businesses of all sizes. From simple web backups to backup appliances to full scale BC/DR plans, there are solutions for your firm. What's appropriate for you? You will have to assess your

risk tolerance. Many of these services are just a few billable hours in cost, but they could save your firm from a huge short-term loss or the loss of the firm entirely. Do you want to be responsible for that loss?

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