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about business continuity and disaster recovery now will ensure your firm's data is ...

Tomas Suros • Jun. 15, 2020

The next disaster – a new epidemic, data breach, earthquake or flood – could compromise data, result in lost business or prevent employees from accessing a physical office. How quickly will your firm be ready to seamlessly continue operations?

We have all experienced a change in the way we work. As all or most employees work remotely, accounting firms need to employ best practices to ensure sensitive data is protected. It is important for all organizations to have solid plans and protocols in place to recover from a breach or disaster, ensure the continuity of business and allow employees to work from home easily.

By enabling and documenting remote work now in response to this crisis,

- **Transparency with Firm Employees.** Knowledge is power when it comes to bouncing back from a crisis. It is crucial that the firm be transparent about the current health and security risks.
- **Communications to Clients.** Share the steps and technologies that the firm is using with your clients so they understand that your firm is prepared and the trusted advisor relationship is protected. Encourage all clients to use the firm's secure portal to share documents and reports.
- **Clear Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.** All firms today need to have clear terms of service and privacy policies in place that inform clients how their personal data and information are managed and protected. Part of those policies should include a clear statement of the firm's remote work protocols and protections.
- **Location of Data.** Recovery plans require convenient access to data, so you must know where and how your data is stored at all times. Easier access comes from having your data stored in the right manner, so you should think ahead and only work with providers that keep your data in jurisdictions that ensure compliance and make the most sense for your firm and client base.
- **Data Segmentation.** Employing data segmentation practices in advance will help with continuity and recovery. Using a private cloud isolates your data from the data of other companies, because you're not sharing infrastructure when you are in a public multitenant cloud. Data mirroring, or the practice of maintaining exact, real-time copies of data in another location, eliminates single points of failure and ensures that you still have access to your data if one server is compromised.
- **99.999% Uptime.** Remote access depends on your systems being as available as possible. Some cloud service providers promise 99.9% uptime, which may sound great, but in reality that translates to your systems being unavailable for hours at a time a few days each year. You want your providers to offer 99.999% uptime, often

noted as “five nines,” which means you’ll have less than 10 minutes of total

you need to make sure you have immediate failover capabilities in place across the board to ensure continuity.

- **Backups.** Having backups for networks, systems and other technology is critical to ensuring continuity and avoiding downtime, but they’re only useful if you know they work. You should not only be making a point of regularly backing up your data and systems, you should also regularly test and verify your backups to make sure they’ll function when you actually need them.
- **Termination.** If you need to terminate the use of a technology or a relationship with a provider due to a breach, you need to have clear processes in place. Among other things, they should guarantee a timeline for recovering any compromised data and make clear who owns that data after termination.

The immediate need to support remote work has brought with it an increasingly complex and risky landscape in ensuring your firm’s data is safe. Thinking proactively about business continuity and disaster recovery now will ensure your firms data is safe today and you are ready for future disasters and WFH scenarios that may occur.

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