

The SMB Business Continuity Guide

How to Protect Technology
Needs from Disasters

Why Business Continuity Matters

Disaster can strike at any time. Weather conditions don't always follow predictable seasonal changes. Natural disasters tend to strike fast and year-round. Even in the temperate climates free of tornados or hurricanes, businesses aren't always safe; property damage, such as from fire, can compromise data storage and voice connections. Without access to data and voice services, small to midsize businesses (SMBs) lose productivity; loss of production reduces cash flow. SMBs cannot afford to close their doors while recovering. Companies need a business continuity plan to maintain critical functions during disaster recovery.

The Impact of Disasters on Business

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2013 reports that the Americas suffered 34.3 billion dollars (USD) in damages caused by disasters. According to the IT Disaster Recovery Preparedness (DRP) Council's 2014 Annual Report, over one third of companies lose one or more critical applications, virtual machines, or imperative data files for hours at a time when disaster strikes. 63.3% of businesses affected by a disaster will incur costs due to losing critical applications or data; 10% of those businesses will incur costs upwards of \$100,000 USD.

SMBs cannot expect to absorb these windfalls of expenses, and saving funds to self-insure for such emergency expenditures is unreasonable and impractical.

Evaluating Business Continuity Needs

In order to determine the appropriate business continuity and disaster recovery plan, companies need to evaluate the mission-critical functions to their business. Only then can a company estimate the cost to maintain production during disaster recovery. To begin evaluating business continuity needs, companies should make a list of the following:

-  Data and processes necessary for regulatory compliance
-  Systems, applications, networks, and facilities critical and necessary to function
-  Personnel responsible for required business functions
-  Dependencies on each critical business function
-  Acceptable length of time for breaks in functionality

A Strong Business Continuity Plan Yields Positive ROI

Thinking about the issues presented when evaluating business continuity needs will show a company how fast and long production can stop during a major disaster. Lost revenue during down times can sink a SMB, which is why companies need to invest in contingency plans to mitigate the consequences of disasters. Business continuity plans generate positive returns on investment (ROI) because the money spent now is worth preventing devastating potential losses.

Every business knows the importance of voice and data. More than ever companies maintain continuous communication with customers, and rely on constant connection to company data to perform business functions. Companies must hedge against potential outages in voice and data services, as well as insure against loss of sensitive information.

Voice Continuity

When a disaster strikes, companies should expect issues with voice services. Even light rainfall can negatively affect analog connections, so most businesses opt for wireless solutions to maintain voice continuity; however, depending solely on wireless phones poses a new set of risks. If a company were to enact a voice continuity plan that depended on wireless phones, that company would have to consider the following:

- ▶ Periodic distributions of personnel mobile contact information within the company to keep records up to date
- ▶ Check-ins with clients to ensure their rolodex of company mobile contact information is current

In a technology age where memorizing a telephone number is unnecessary, requiring clients to learn or save additional contact information is cumbersome. Instead of depending on keeping everyone informed about mobile contact information, companies can utilize the power of call forwarding services. Service providers with business continuity offerings will provide companies with the flexibility to forward calls remotely, rerouting voice calls to mobile phones or an alternate site unaffected by the disaster.

Data Continuity

SMBs face a plethora of data backup solutions, but ultimately companies need redundancy and multiple sites. One backup is never enough, and if all the backups are stored at the same location then a disaster that strikes a facility could wipe everything out. Cloud services make the most sense because they offer a cost effective way for SMBs to backup data automatically, while maintaining physical distance from business facilities.

A great backup plan is nothing without an efficient recovery process. Even if a company takes the right precautions to back up its data, slow recovery times can still stifle production and business functions. When planning recovery processes, SMBs should consider the following:

- ▶ Bare Metal Recovery technology reduces recovery time for rebuilding servers
- ▶ Granular files and Application Recovery circumvents time lost recovering entire volumes and databases

Practice Makes Perfect

Testing business continuity with practice sessions under disaster conditions will highlight any shortcomings in a company's current plan. Industry standards recommend conducting a trial run of business continuity plans and disaster recovery systems once per quarter. Regular testing keeps a company up to date on its backup and recovery needs, as well as providing necessary data to maintain a tight budget for disaster contingency plans.

Choosing a Service Provider

Every company needs to assess service providers based on the features offered, but also the benefits needed for the company. Not every organization will need all business contingency features available; at some point the cost to hedge against disasters will yield a negative ROI. The key is to start by identifying the key business functions that need protection, and then build a budget to safeguard those functions. Working from a budget first, instead of based upon needs, can push companies to save money instead of building the necessary insurance against catastrophes. Regardless of which service provider a company chooses, it's always reasonable to purchase services from multiple providers. Redundancy is at the core of business continuity, and purchasing voice and data services from multiple providers hedges against a provider's network failure halting a company's protection.

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