

Thought Leader: Ten Tips for Mastering Disaster Recovery

Preventing disaster from resulting in data loss

Natural threats are always unpredictable. But how do you prevent these occurrences from impacting the availability of data and the operations of your business?

In a 2006 survey conducted by Verio, 70 percent of small businesses reported that they would consider a single incident of data loss significant and costly. Yet only nine percent said they were familiar with business continuity and disaster recovery solutions.

The consequences of a disaster can be dire indeed. "A company denied access to mission-critical data for more than 48 hours," reports industry analyst John W. Toigo, "will likely be out of business within a year." (*Disaster Recovery Planning*, April 2008).

So what's a small-business I.T. manager to do?

Tip 1: Draft a plan

A sound disaster recovery plan takes into account your business's equipment, applications, connectivity, infrastructure and employees, as well as data. Look at each business area and note the possible risks to it. How much data could you lose? How many customers would that impact? Will you be able to comply with regulations?

Tip 2: Examine your processes

Disaster recovery solutions don't always involve expensive new purchases. "Security isn't about the most expensive box or the latest and greatest software tool," points out Russell Morgan in *PC Magazine* (6/5/07). "Security is about strengthening all the links in your business chain, from systems to processes... You'd be surprised how often the weakest link has more to do with your business processes than it does with equipment."

Tip 3: Test your plan every six months

It's absolutely critical to give your business continuity plan a regular six-month check-up — even more frequently if a major acquisition was added to your network. Customers change, databases evolve, new processes get instituted, hardware and software get replaced, and the plan you drafted a year ago no longer meets your company's needs. Use the six-month check-up to bring everything up to date.

Tip 4: Back up your backups

The best way to ensure against data loss is relentless and redundant backup. Back up your data to disk and to tape every day. Many data-intensive small businesses are migrating to offsite backup solutions, allowing complete data restoration. Offsite backup further ensures that operating systems and applications will remain unharmed.

Tip 5: Keep the power flowing

Make sure you're protecting servers and network components with an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). A single hour of network downtime can cost more than an entire UPS system. In the event of a power outage, a UPS can close your files and applications and then shut down equipment safely, all before the battery power runs out.

Tip 6: Keep your I.T. tools current

Make sure your network stays up to date by installing the latest patches and upgrades from hardware and software suppliers. *PC Magazine* notes that almost half of small and midsized businesses don't install these free upgrades, which vendors make available to improve protection against emerging and "morphing" threats.

Tip 7: Prepare for disasters of all sizes

Hurricanes, floods or earthquakes may be part of the natural order. But smaller-scale threats that never make the headlines can impact your business just as severely. Thunderstorms can cause power outages, broken pipes can flood storage areas, high winds can cause tree limbs to fall on power lines. Each of these seemingly "minor" incidents — and a host of others — can result in the loss of critical data. Your company's ability to weather these occurrences can often make the difference between swiftly resuming operations and failure.

Tip 8: Virtualize disaster scenarios

Robert Booth, systems engineer at Knowledgeable and Innovative Technical Solutions in Round Rock, TX, used to wake up nights worrying about server failures. His solution: Use virtualization to minimize the number and duration of actual outages by simulating potential failures on virtual machines built on VMware servers running in his data center.

Tip 9: Get everybody involved

Each person in your company should treat business continuity like their job depends on it — because it does. Get the owner or partners to commit manpower and resources, and give everyone in the organization a responsibility.

Tip 10: Keep it simple

Ensuring business continuity doesn't have to be needlessly complicated. In many cases, the best business continuity plan for a small business is nothing more than an accurate, up-to-date operations manual that describes how to run your business, make backups, and run the telecommunications infrastructure, as well as lists your vendors and employee contact information.

Finally — work with a trusted partner who knows your business

Managing disaster recovery isn't a responsibility you have to shoulder on your own. Your CDW account manager can provide the advice and support you need, based on a complete understanding of your business and the hardware and software you have in place. Ask your CDW account manager how to get started with your disaster recovery plan.

And do it as soon as possible. The next unforeseen disaster is coming. We just don't know when.

