

How backed up is your backup?

Proper planning can help ensure your company is prepared for any disaster. **Interviewed by Troy Sympson**

Just about every company realizes the importance of a good backup plan. But, while backing up critical information is a known necessity, many companies are not prepared for disasters. True disaster recovery and business continuity plans need to have a recovery time objective attached to each and every critical system or process in the company.

"If you were a credit card customer in Australia trying to put fuel in your car, for example, and their main processing office was at the World Trade Center in New York City when it went down, how long of a wait would be acceptable that you can't buy fuel because a building on the other side of the Earth collapsed?" asks Rory Sanchez, CEO and president of SLPowers, an IT professional services company with offices serving South Florida and Metro Atlanta

It's a must that you examine every system in your organization in order to see how critical it is for you to continue servicing your clients and to determine the acceptable amount of time you can take to recover those systems.

Every company is dependent on some system, whether it's phone lines, a Web site or any other business application. When disaster strikes, a company needs to know how to adapt without their systems. Part of this includes knowing whether or not you can get by with yesterday's data, or if you need continuous data protection, to recover information from no more than a few minutes before the disaster occurred.

Smart Business spoke with Sanchez about backing up your company's data and how taking a few minutes to prepare now can save you weeks of headaches later.

Why should a company back up their work?

Imagine a writer losing the novel that he just finished writing or a business not knowing how much money their clients owe them. The need for backing up data is simple — data that must be recreated equates to lost time, lost efforts and lost



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revenue. I've seen statistics stating that as many as 50 percent of companies that suffer a disaster without proper planning go out of business within two years.

What disasters can a company face?

Disaster can come in all forms, including equipment failures, telecom failures, utility outages, fire, flood, terrorism, employee sabotage or transportation shutdowns. What if a key employee is kidnapped or multiple key employees become ill? Your primary supplier could suddenly go out of business or your primary revenue producing equipment could be stolen. In Boca Raton, we saw a biological disaster that rendered a business building unusable for over six years.

What are the solutions to disasters?

The key to surviving a disaster is, again, to identify the critical components of your business, whether they are data systems, phone systems, processes or personnel, and build a plan that would allow you to continue doing business during or shortly after experiencing a loss of one or more of

those critical components. In the data and telecom world, this is readily accomplished by collocating critical systems in robust data centers, mirroring data to remote locations, and leveraging remotely hosted communication systems (including phone systems), which are unlikely to be affected by the same disaster that is affecting your facility. Today, even the smallest of businesses are seeing the need for formal disaster planning and are taking action to ensure their contingency needs are met.

How can a company stay ahead of the game?

Awareness is probably the No. 1 issue. The old notion of, 'It couldn't happen to us,' is quite common. Of course, it is almost impossible to protect against every single situation. The important thing is, again, to identify the most critical systems, procedures and even people. And, you have to consider the acceptable amount of time the systems can be down. In my credit card example, a customer might be more sympathetic to a nuclear blast than a fallen building. On the other hand, a company might say: 'If there's a nuclear blast in our hometown, we're OK with going out of business.' It's all a matter of putting things into perspective. Something like a nuclear blast is highly unlikely, so most small companies do not need to plan for it. But, hurricanes in Florida, earthquakes in California or floods in much of the rest of the country are more likely. The key to successful disaster planning is to bring in a specialist to help you to imagine what you don't, and then help you to build continuity plans for those critical systems.

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