Broadview
NETWORKS®

4 Ways to Make Sure Your Company Stays Online During the Next Disaster

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Let's face it, disasters happen. And when disasters happen, you could lose revenue.

While the big storms, freak blizzards and flooding events are top concerns for most, business leaders know that in reality smaller "disasters" have a greater chance of impacting our daily lives and operations. Small, man-made disasters like spilled coffee and stolen laptops are the types we all need to prepare for as they are almost certain to occur.

Whether disasters are man-made or natural, their effects can usually be avoided. Steps taken today will dramatically reduce the time and revenue lost.

MOVING FORWARD BY BACKING UP

Information is the lifeblood of every company. From personal business files on PCs to sensitive corporate data on corporate servers, access to information allows us to make day-to-day business decisions. Companies need to make sure all relevant data is backed up—meaning an exact replica is securely stored so data can be accessed—even when the primary data is lost, corrupted or inaccessible.

Cloud-based data backup and recovery tools are popular, as files are replicated and stored off site. These solutions can create a backup copy in the cloud of the data in all your company's servers and computers—regardless of location—and allows you to quickly restore files on demand.

When looking for a backup solution, be sure that your data will be truly secure. Good providers store data in SAS 70 Type II-certified data centers; great providers do the same, but they also store data in multiple data centers, so that they too have a backup. You will also want to understand the security of the data being transmitted. Most cloud services leverage the Internet for transport, which is risky—you don't want to leave your corporate data in a readable format while it is in transit.

The most important factors in setting up a backup solution are the time it takes to recover your data and reload it from the remote source. If data restoration is ever required, you will want to start recovering time-sensitive materials via the network immediately; for companies with large volumes of data, this could take days, weeks or even months. Look for a solution in which your provider will prepare and ship a physical hard drive to you so that your business doesn't experience any more delays.

OFF SITE, NOT OUT OF TOUCH

When the power dies or the flood waters short out your new server, you'll wish that device was elsewhere. More than ever, companies are choosing to move business IT infrastructure into the cloud. Companies are outsourcing the equipment used to support operations, including storage, hardware, servers and networking components. In today's cloud computing model, the service provider owns the equipment and is responsible for housing, running and maintaining it while you focus on running your business.

Moving your infrastructure to the cloud brings with it a few important considerations. First and foremost is reliability. Your service provider should be able to provide you with a written guarantee called a service level agreement (SLA) that details its reliability. The SLA should guarantee 99.99% uptime.

You will also want to make sure that the service provider is capable of supporting all your business applications, not just the most popular ones. Many times, providers will claim

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support for a specific software package, and you will discover, only after spending hours or days trying to make it work, that they only support another version of the software. Broad support also covers you if and when you add additional applications to your operation.

Scalability is also important since your business is never standing still. Make sure you can turn up and turn down servers on demand. Many providers allow you to make changes using a web-based customer portal. This type of access is ideal, as you can get new resources up and running on a moment's notice, regardless of location and without any capital investment or additional IT resources. The last thing you need to worry about during a recovery is how to fund your next server, upgrade an existing server on the fly or allocate more resources (RAM, CPUs, storage or bandwidth) to meet unforeseen demand.

Several providers are even offering "Desktops as a Service" where an employee's data and applications are virtualized and accessed on almost any device including personal computers, tablets, even most smart phones. So in the event of a disaster, employees have all the tools and data necessary to maintain their course from any device. Solutions vary by provider but at a minimum should include complete access to Microsoft Office® software and all line of business applications.

Finally, as with data backup, you will want to make sure your data is stored and transmitted securely. Again, look for a provider with SAS 70 Type II designations and one that replicates data across multiple, geographically diverse data centers.

MAKING SURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD

Your business will recover faster if your customers can hear your voice and speak with your employees. Regardless of how fast the Internet moves and grows, your voice is the most important communication tool you have. Conversations will never be fully replaced by digital communications, so keeping those lines of communications open should not be forgotten.

The great news is that there are several cost-effective options on the market today for companies looking to keep phone calls flowing, even during a disaster. Select service providers now offer businesses voice services that use the Internet for transport, instead of dedicated circuits. Calls are taken to and from your phone system and transported over the Internet to the carrier's network.

Whether you have a traditional TDM-based phone system requiring a primary rate interface (PRI) or a newer IP-based phone system that has a session initiated protocol (SIP) interface, you can now transport calls using the Internet as either a cost-effective primary service or a scalable backup service, assuming you have ample and reliable Internet bandwidth.

When such a system is installed as a backup, calls can flow to the alternate provider as necessary. It could be used during a disaster if your primary circuit fails or as auxiliary capacity. Many providers offer usage-based and bundled minute packages so you can customize the service to your exact needs.

PHONE SYSTEM AS A SERVICE?

Cloud-based IP phone systems minimize the impact a disaster has on an organization the same way remote data backup does. With most cloud-based phone systems, the phones are in your office, but the intelligence of the service is secure in the cloud, so no matter where you are, you can use the system. There are a few things to consider before jumping in.

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Getting the features and applications you need and want can help your business survive a disaster and make you more productive. Most providers have basic features like hold and transfer, but other providers have unique applications and features like softphones (which allow you to make and receive calls from an Internet-connected PC) and mobile twinning (which allow you to send calls to your cell and desk phone simultaneously for complete coverage) that can make your company available during any disaster.

Deploying softphones is a cost-effective way to enable mobility and disaster avoidance across your organization. PC-based softphones are often stand-alone applications like Skype, but with many cloud-based solutions they are part of the overall system. In such cases, the advanced providers completely integrate the softphone, offering your mobile professionals full office phone functionality through any PC, anywhere they travel. Soft-phones function just like your desk phone—using the same extension and accessing the same features, such as call forwarding, extension-to-extension dialing and voicemail. This offers you seamless communications from anywhere.

Mobile twinning, as well as similar applications, allows your inbound calls to be sent to your cell and desk phone at the same time. Better than "find-me, follow-me," calls are immediately sent to both locations. Mobile twinning is a great disaster-avoidance solution, as you don't have to be in the office to take calls. So whether you are down the hall retrieving something from the printer or at home because your office is under five feet of water, your calls will continue to reach you.

You should also be sure that phone features work even if your phone doesn't have power. Some cloud-based systems rely on the phone for advanced routing and applications. If the features only work when the power is on, you may be no better off that you are now. Features should live in the cloud so no matter what issues affect you local, your system is safe.

Above all, make sure you also know what you are buying! Buying phones may be a good option for some, but if a phone breaks during a disaster you may have a hard time finding the phone you need or the cash required to purchase another. Some providers offer the whole system as a service so you don't ever have to worry about capital or managing an inventory of phones.

Finally, advancements in technology allow select next-generation phone systems to have automatic failover capability. In a disaster scenario, the system itself can automatically send calls over an alternate provider—meaning your calls keep flowing without any interruption. This type of disaster preparedness could save you thousands.

EXPERIENCE. EXPERIENCE. EXPERIENCE.

This is probably the most important consideration. Technology evolves quickly, and while the barriers to entering many markets are low, the learning curve to provide high quality business services is not. It seems like a new service provider is born every week, and while some providers are very good, others will fail. You could be left high and dry when you need them the most.

Take time to review any and all financial data you can so you know the health of the company you are signing up with. Make sure you know how long they have been providing service and how many customers they support. Talk to existing customers and get references from the service provider so you can make an informed decision. It takes years of experience to develop the right type of service and support structure to respond quickly and effectively when many customers are disrupted at the same time.

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ABOUT BROADVIEW NETWORKS

A fundamental shift is underway as organizations migrate away from capital-intensive and rigid information technology infrastructures to more flexible environments that improve availability, productivity, flexibility and security, while reducing the overall cost of ownership. According to analysts, 75% of companies will be using enterprise-class cloud-computing solutions within five years.*

Broadview Networks is enabling these organizations to embrace the shift to cloud-based services on their own timetable, with the experience, support and knowledge required to make the transition seamless. Broadview Networks is the premier information technology and communications partner for businesses across the country. Our all-encompassing approach allows companies to concentrate their efforts on running their business, not their IT environment or communications infrastructure.

Every day, tens of thousands of businesses rely on Broadview Networks for their mission-critical communications and IT needs. Broadview delivers cloud-computing productivity software including hosted versions of Microsoft O¬ffice, SharePoint and Exchange, hosting for all of a business's applications, a full suite of cloud-based managed network security applications and desktop and server data backup services. It also provides a patented hosted IP phone solution, data networking applications including VPN- and MPLS-enabled services, high-speed Internet access services, as well as traditional local and long-distance voice communications and other related services. Broadview also provides its customers with new levels of transparency through its award-winning eCare Enterprise customer service portal and can even help organizations make it all work together with IT and professional services.

What's Your Cloud Strategy?
To develop your plan, contact your Broadview Networks representative, or call *1-800-BROADVIEW*.

*IDG Research Services and CIO Custom Solutions Group "Enterprise-Grade Cloud Computing Adoption"