

Educating End Users on DR and Business Continuity

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This article can be used to provide your end users with an overview of what Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity is and to give them a better understanding of why it is important.

Most people today can remember where they were on 11 September 2001 when two planes flew into the World Trade Centre in the United States in a massive terrorist attack. Similarly, millions of people watched the unfolding drama of Hurricane Katrina and the resulting devastation it caused in New Orleans.

Many other instances of disasters on a massive scale are played out all over the world on a daily basis. But in addition to these events that capture the attention of the world, there are hundreds of small-scale disasters that happen every day. Buildings burn down, offices are flooded, and electricity generation or distribution fails leaving entire areas without electricity.

Beyond the human tragedy caused by the large-scale events and the immediate inconvenience caused by the smaller scale events, there are further implications that may not be obvious at first glance. Small and big businesses can be seriously affected when one of these events occur and this can often have long lasting consequences

If a company's customers cannot receive their orders on time, or a company is not contactable or cannot operate for a period of time as a result of one of these incidents, they suffer damage to their reputation and often lose existing and potentially new customers that they may never be able to win back.

The statistics in this regard are frightening - a very high percentage of companies affected by an incident that they are not able to overcome very rapidly will go out of business within a year. As a result, their employees will be out of a job, shareholders in the organisation will have lost their investment and a ripple effect from these events can affect a lot more people than apparent at the time of the initial incident.

As a result, it is the responsibility of the directors of small and large companies to plan for how they would overcome an incident that affects their ability to operate. Business Continuity, part science and part art, is the process of planning for continuity of business operations after such an event and covers areas including facilities, human resources, crisis communication planning and IT systems.

A sub-set of Business Continuity planning is Disaster Recovery planning, which generally is used to refer to keeping computer systems going during a disaster event or recovery of computer systems at an alternate location during an event.

In order to ensure that our Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery plan is effective, it is necessary to perform regular testing and updating of our plans. We therefore hold regular Disaster Recovery tests whereby we ensure that we can run our IT systems from backup systems that we have available.

As part of this testing, we require a subset of employees to be involved in the testing to ensure that the recovered systems are operating correctly and to verify data. As such, if you are asked to be involved it is important that you realise that this is a critical part of our responsibility, and one that needs to be taken seriously. By ensuring that our systems can be quickly and effectively recovered, we are protecting our organisation and therefore also the job security of our employees.

As a result of the systems testing and the other activities documented in our Business Continuity document we know that we are well prepared for an unexpected incident that may one day challenge our ability to keep the business running.

The reality is that disasters have always and will always occur. While we may not have been directly affected by an incident yet, we need to ensure that we plan and prepare for the unexpected for the sake of our customers, our shareholders and ultimately ourselves as employees.

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