



Disaster Recovery 2006 — Remember the People

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Many organizations have developed disaster recovery procedures to ensure mission critical data will be available when a disaster occurs. These plans may include replicating data to a second site that is located blocks or miles away from the primary data center. Plans have been successfully implemented and tested to ensure the availability of critical applications. Nevertheless, the disasters that occurred within the United States boundaries in the last years have proven that **the plans neglected one critical element – the availability of its people.**

Example: The City of New Orleans

The city of New Orleans is below sea level – an uncomfortable geographic location for any disaster recovery planner. Recognizing the vulnerability of this location, New Orleans businesses established secondary data centers miles away in another state, such as Texas or Mississippi. This second data center was far removed from the under-sea-level city of New Orleans, or so we believed. In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the levees that protected New Orleans were breached, and most of New Orleans was under water.

Companies with secondary sites located in Mississippi discovered that the secondary site fared no better than the primary one. Parts of Mississippi were also flooded. Both the primary and secondary data centers were inoperable. These customers had to rebuild their IT environment from offsite backup tapes in a third location, a long and painful process.

Data centers located in Texas were spared and processing could continue at these sites. Unfortunately, people with knowledge about applications and systems are required to run data centers. Many of these New Orleans-based businesses faced an enormous problem. They could not locate their people.

When New Orleans flooded, company employees were forced to evacuate. They ended up in large temporary shelters, or in hotels, or family residences far away from the city where they worked. The infrastructure that supported landline phones, cell phones, and Internet connections were inoperable in the surrounding areas. Employees were scattered to different parts of the country and it took weeks for companies to locate them. **The data was available, but the people were not.**

Lessons Learned

A critical part to Disaster Recovery planning must include plans to communicate to employees during and after a disaster. Many of us have been involved with fire drills, where all employees evacuate the buildings and meet at a specified location, usually across the street or in the parking lot. However, in New Orleans, these locations were also under water. Employees need to know an alternative place to meet, if the area around the data center is no longer safe.

Companies typically create a call list with employees' home phone numbers. This can be an effective tool, if it is kept up to date. Katrina taught us that home phone records were no longer useful for contacting employees. This list must be stored in a secure location, must contain alternate contact information, such as cell phone numbers and pager numbers, and must be kept up-to-date.

Katrina also taught us that even if these lists were up-to-date, there were still large communications problems. Mobile phones may have worked for a while, until batteries, ran low and employees had no means to recharge the batteries. DR plans need to include secondary telecommunications providers, alternate meeting sites, and alternate means for communicating.

As you might expect, the lessons that Katrina taught us are not new. For days after the attack on the World Trade Center, companies in New York struggled to locate their people. Here again, the collapse of the telecommunications infrastructure left employees with few, if any, means to communicate with each other.

Changes Are Taking Place

The responsibility for disaster recovery has been elevated in many corporations. The locations of primary and secondary data centers are being reviewed. Companies are considering moving secondary data centers farther away to isolate the second data center from regional disasters. New recovery procedures are being written and tested for data recovery. Companies must also review their personnel policies and modify them to provide for the effective communications and safety of their people.

Disaster recovery planners, by the nature of their job, plan for the worst. The definition of the worst that could happen changed on September 11, 2001. We wanted to believe that we would never have to experience a disaster of this magnitude again. However, Katrina reminded us that we always have to be prepared for the worst. The success of the business, and the safety of its people, depends on it.



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