

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING YOUR BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

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### DOES YOUR BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN REALLY WORK?

A business continuity plan ensures your business has continuous access to critical applications in the event of network failure. Many businesses run the risk of rendering their business continuity plan obsolete if not irrelevant by failing to test them on a regular basis, especially as their business grows and changes.

Testing is critical to validate any business continuity plan and companies are increasingly recognizing this. Organizations are showing a greater sense of urgency, especially those that automate critical business processes, operate in a 24x7 world and engage more and more with their customers online. In all of these environments, business continuity, availability and security are highly interdependent. Recognizing this, organizations now understand that testing needs to examine vulnerabilities in an integrated, systemic way to ensure delivery of the service levels their business needs following a network failure.

#### According to recent surveys:

- AT&T found that just 50% or less of companies had tested their business continuity plan in the past 12 months, with 26 percent never having tested it at all.
- The Chartered Management Institute, in conjunction with the Continuity Forum and VERITAS Software, found that only 52 percent of organizations rehearse their business continuity plan once or more per year.
- The Association of Financial Professionals found that despite the fact that almost half of the respondents said their organizations' were impacted when a disaster struck:
  - Only 24 percent said their business had recently tested its business continuity plan as a direct result of the disaster;
  - Only 26 percent plan to test their business continuity plan in the near future;
  - 50 percent have no plans to test their business continuity plans.
- Synstar found that just 12 percent of companies tested their business continuity procedures twice a year. Some 35 percent of companies haven't tested procedures in the last two years, while 38 percent of business continuity managers state that they test procedures once a year.

#### How often should you test your business continuity plan?

Your business continuity plan should be tested at least annually and/or when you have significant changes to technology, business processes or personnel.

#### How do you determine if your business continuity plan testing is successful?

You should ensure you have a defined test plan that establishes specific objectives prior to the test being performed. An **attainable and clearly stated testing plan** will be used to determine if the recovery efforts tested were successful. If some test objectives fail, the business continuity plan, recovery procedures and test objectives should be reevaluated. The test should be repeated until all aspects of the business continuity plan are considered successful. Once the business continuity plan is deemed adequate, it should then be tested annually. Testing objectives should be set to start small and increase in complexity and scope over time. Achieving the following objectives provides progressive levels of assurance and confidence in the plan.

#### What applications need to be tested?

Critical applications that ensure business workflow and contribute to the risk of revenue loss should be tested more frequently as they will have a greater impact in the event of a network failure. Although obvious ones such as Mail, Database and Web servers are always top of mind, the real testing needs to take place with the servers that you may not consider to be mission critical but could contain data that is. HR servers or files that contain employee contact information as an example are servers which contain mission critical data, as are workstations or drives that contain payroll data. Image not being able to make payroll? BlackBerry servers are increasingly becoming one of the most important areas within a communication plan as our IP Phone systems and PBX's. Although your office may not be readily accessible you may still need to communicate or redirect inbound or outbound calls. How is that going to take place?



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### Who should be involved in the testing process?

All personnel who have a specific and important role in managing business units and critical applications (i.e. Email servers, payroll, accounts receivable/payable) in your business workflow should be involved in the testing process. Management should also be made aware of who the BCP team members are and what roles they play. All members that are involved need to ensure they provide feedback and become a part of the solution building and qualifying exercise. Their feedback and involvement is crucial to ensuring a well rounded plan is in place.

### What should happen after the test?

Now that the test is over, ensure that all parties involved have a meeting to determine what went well and what could have been done differently. Document the results of the test. Did the organization meet objectives? Capturing results will improve the plan and future testing. Most importantly, communicate test results to management as they are ultimately responsible for the continuity of critical business processes.



### Summary

A business continuity plan is not complete until it is tested. Untested business continuity plans cannot be relied upon following a business interruption or disaster. A formal business continuity plan testing process provides management, customers, suppliers and employees with the assurance that the plan will work as documented and that the business is a well organized and run operation. An effective test can have many mistakes but an organization that is able to identify these, refine their plan and build a stronger corporate knowledge of their needs and steps will have a significant benefit from those competitors that do not have a tested plan in place.



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