

# Will your business survive the next disaster?

**A**s we all know by now, you can't get out of the way of a natural disaster. You also can't predict a cyber attack. But what you can do is plan how your business would respond to and act during a disaster.

Have you taken the time to create a disaster plan? If you had a plan during the Floods of 2008, have you modified it or practiced the plan since? If not then the time is now.

We have all seen statistics regarding businesses and their survival after disasters, but one that stands out is the Touché Ross study that shows the survival rate for companies without a disaster recovery plan is less than 10 percent. And, according to a recent National Federation of Independent Business small business poll, man-made disasters affect 10 percent of small businesses, whereas natural disasters have impacted more than 30 percent of all small businesses in the United States.

So you know why you need to have a plan, but what is a disaster recovery plan and what does it look like?

Simply put, a business continuity plan or disaster recovery plan is a documented and practiced plan for how your organization will act in and respond to a disaster with the goal of keeping your business functioning. The plan should take into consideration your building, your employees and your business. Disasters could include local events like ice storms, tornadoes, lightning storms, earthquakes, fires, floods, cyber attacks, or national events like power grids going down or pandemic illness.

The plan needs to address everything from

short disruptions that last hours or days to complete loss of a building.

First, conduct an impact analysis, threat analysis and impact scenarios to create a plan. Define critical (urgent) and non-critical (non-urgent) organization functions and activities. Then define your recovery point objective — how long it will take to recover the data — and your recovery time objective — the amount of time it will take to restore the function.

Second, identify the most cost-effective disaster recovery solution that meets the recovery point objective and recovery time objective. Identify the people who keep your business running and their backups and job functions that are critical to keep your business going for a few hours and for the long run, including their contact information. Identify external contacts, contractors, vendors, and service personnel you deal with on a daily basis. Build a separate list of contacts for those outside your business that you would need to contact in case you need to implement your plan. Don't forget important numbers and information for things like utility companies, police, fire, hospitals and post office.

Third, create a formal document of your plan. After all, what good is it if no one can get to it? Assemble a printed document and save it as an electronic file that can be sent via e-mail or kept in off-site document storage. Make copies for key personnel and have them take it home and store it there. Review the plan on a regular basis and make changes as necessary. Consider mandatory training classes for all employees and make it part of your new employee orientation process.

Fourth, test your plan. If it has not been tested, how do you know it is going to work? Testing will uncover what you forgot and what you need to add.

Finally, be sure to leverage technology to

make the plan more efficient.

- **Virtualization** – VMware Infrastructure is transforming the way disaster recovery is done, making it cost-effective, rapid and reliable, enabling recovery of all your production applications.

- **Notebooks** – By providing notebooks to key personnel and making them part of your formal plan and directing employees to take the notebooks off-site at the end of each workday provides an efficient way to equip your key employees with disaster recovery tools.

- **Backup and disaster recovery service** – There are a number of affordable disk-to-disk backup appliances that provide an efficient and cost-effective method of backing up your key business data.

- **Voice over Internet Protocol** – New Unified Communication solutions allow you to recover services typically provided by an on-premise switch.

- **Off-site data replication** – In addition to having your critical data backed up locally, it can be copied to and recovered from remote secure data centers across the United States in the event the disaster takes out your corporate location or region.

As you can see, many things need to be taken into consideration when planning for a disaster. This is just the start of a disaster recover/business continuity plan, but isn't your business worth it? Hopefully, I have at least



sparked sufficient interest for you to begin creating your plan.

**Mike Brogan** is president of Erb's Technology Solutions in Cedar Rapids. He can be reached at (319) 364-5159.