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Disaster Recovery Isn't Just For Big Business

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Business-continuity plans are a must for smaller companies, too

By Martin J. Garvey

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Small businesses may have more to lose than large companies when a disaster-natural or otherwise-strikes. Because of costs or lack of resources, many smaller companies have less-rigorous business-continuity plans in place, and some have no formal processes at all.

That meant trouble for many smaller companies that were located in lower Manhattan on Sept. 11. The lesson Computer Integrated Services LLC, itself a small (60-employee) company in downtown New York, hopes businesses will learn is that they can improve their business-continuity and disaster-recovery readiness on a small-company budget.

Affordable, near-real-time off-site data backup, review of event logs for accuracy, pre-built front-end replicas of applications, and the use of thin-client architectures (via Citrix Systems Inc.'s MetaFrame remote-access software) are attainable business-continuity goals for small businesses, says Mike Zepernick, Computer Integrated Services' president. But few clients took steps in these directions before the terrorist attacks.

New York recruiting firm Digital Market Research Inc. is in midtown Manhattan, well removed from Ground Zero. But when Verizon Communications Inc.'s network went down after the attacks and took out Digital Market's Internet service provider, the company's employees lost communication with customers and potential clients. Even though Digital Market's data was secure on the office network and accessible by employees internally, the company lost as much as \$120,000 because of its inability to communicate beyond its four walls.



"I will not be down again," says Von Ahnen, Digital Market Research's VP of sales. The firm focused on off-site backup after Sept. 11.

"We were literally 15 people going out of our minds," says John Von Ahnen, VP of sales. Each morning, Von Ahnen would check that Digital Market's on-site Veritas Net Backup system was working, and each week, he would take home the backup tape containing a database of 130,000 leads and lock it in a safe. "I just started thinking about complete access," Von Ahnen says. "Sweat's pouring down my forehead, and I can't let this happen again."

That's when he got a call from Zepernick and decided at last to put in place a duplicate network infrastructure at the integrator's data center in Netcong, N.J., 50 miles west of Manhattan, to let employees access data via a Web browser from any location using Citrix software. Employees could

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work from home in an emergency, because it's unlikely that all of their home phone and network access would simultaneously fail. "I feel secure now," Von Ahnen says.

Data can be replicated to Computer Integrated Services' backup center as often as customers choose. The fireproof, waterproof, secured data center is stocked with industry-standard Compaq and Dell servers, Advanced Digital Information tape libraries, and NovaStor backup and recovery software. Computer Integrated Services' headquarters was in the shadow of the twin towers, and though the company had to scramble for a new location after the attacks, having its backup facilities in Netcong meant it was serving customers on Sept. 12.

That's become a powerful message for Zepernick to pitch to potential clients. Customers who want duplicate networks, with a four-hour data-recovery promise, will pay nearly \$50,000 per year at the high end for the service, depending on how much data they need backed up, how many servers they'll require, and whether they choose to use the Citrix remote-access option. The service includes application access as well as data recovery, so clients can get back to work quickly. But customers who don't need immediate access can employ a business-continuity plan for as little as \$15,000 per year.

It's much needed in some cases, Zepernick says. "We showed up at one customer site, and two weeks worth of tape drives were just sitting there, at risk from any sort of accident or disaster," he says. The person who normally took the tapes to an off-site location had quit two weeks before, and no one had taken over her duties.

With help from Computer Integrated Services, Digital Market Research is set to avoid problems that can occur when an automated off-site backup system isn't in place, vows Von Ahnen. "I will not be down again."

Photo by Sacha Lecca

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