



Case Study: Computer Integrated Services

Switching to second server farm saved systems integrator

By Ellen Minter

As companies consider implementing contingency planning and disaster recovery processes in the wake of Sept. 11, it is often best to learn from example. The benefits of Web-based remote application access during a crisis were brought home dramatically to Computer Integrated Services (CIS), a systems integrator based in New York, immediately following the terrorist attacks. The ability to switch to a backup server farm and provide online access to its 60 employees not only saved CIS from financial ruin, but also provided a real-world business resumption example for customers that has led to a new market opportunity.

Following the terrorist attack, CIS's offices in a high-rise close to the World Trade Centers were undamaged but unusable due to the loss of telephony, Internet connectivity and electrical power. However, CIS quickly became a virtual office with the support of Citrix Systems and its own data center in New Jersey, which was used for backing up production servers. As the situation in New York worsened, CIS's engineers made sure data replication was up to date, and although CIS did not have a redundant server farm in place, the engineers were able to implement a second farm and restore data from tape libraries within 24 hours. As a result, application access was available to all CIS employees shortly after the disaster.

Using Citrix MetaFrame and NFuse Classic technologies, which incorporate server-based computing and Web access, employees began accessing applications and servers — such as Microsoft Windows 2000, Novell Netware, Microsoft SQL 2000, Microsoft Exchange 2000 and Red Hat Linux database servers — from home, rented office space in mid-town Manhattan and multiple client sites on Sept. 13. Employees used a variety of connectivity methods, including dial-up, cable modem, T1 lines and DSL, as Internet access was not always available due to damage to the communications system in the city. CIS was also able to use Citrix NFuse Classic portal software to quickly and efficiently deliver specific information about where and when certain employee groups should report for work.

Fast resumption of business operations through remote access enabled CIS to continue serving customers and even persuaded some prospects to close deals. For example, CIS was able to continue taking service requests and address the needs of customers affected by one of the most crippling computer viruses at the time, the Nimbda virus. In addition, CIS was able to close a deal for a large help desk business opportunity because the decision maker was impressed by CIS's ability to continue to operate help desks around the city despite the disaster. With the help of Citrix MetaFrame, CIS also brought new customers on board for remote back ups within two weeks of the disaster, and was able to establish replicas of important applications in its New Jersey facility.

According to a Gartner Group study, "two out of five companies that experience disaster will go out of business in five years." The University of Texas Center for Research on Information System further underscores this point, noting that, "of companies that lose their data in a disaster, 90 percent are out of business within two years." With Citrix, CIS was able to escape these grim statistics and continue to operate successfully. CIS now helps its customers with their disaster recovery strategies.

Michael Zepernick, president of CIS, explained, "We have several large, on-site help desk customers that need constant access to our servers for their operations. We were able to continue responding to service requests because employees could access our system as well as technical and historical databases. We even helped customers with a very difficult virus. Also, clients have been impressed with our proven disaster recovery solution, which has led to a new revenue stream."

Citrix MetaFrame and NFuse Classic technologies were key to CIS's disaster recovery. The Citrix solutions provided "anywhere access," and helped CIS bring its critical applications and servers back online shortly after disaster struck. By having such a solution in place, CIS remained a viable business during extremely difficult times and was able to build goodwill with existing customers, close deals with new customers, create revenue streams and new business opportunities, and save jobs, all while the rest of the city was incapacitated.

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