Ingenuity

Success or Failure? Your Keys to Business Continuity Planning

An Ingenuity Whitepaper

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Overview

With the level of uncertainty in our world regarding events that can disrupt the operation of an enterprise, public or private, we have learned, among other things, that we need to expect the unexpected. And while terrorist attacks and major weather events are the most egregious example of a disaster, we should be prepared for disruptions to the business on all fronts and all levels of severity. While it can be argued that Business Continuity Planning is an expensive and tedious endeavor, it is clear that a well thought out plan that helps assure business continuity in the event of a serious disruption to the operation of the business, may well mean the difference between business success and business failure.

Purpose of Business Continuity Planning

The primary objective of the business continuity plan is to reestablish essential business technology operations should a disruption occur as a result of a disaster or other potential causes. The objective is to assure that critical operations can resume normal processing within a reasonable period. Therefore, the business continuity plan should also:

- Identify weaknesses and implement a disaster prevention program;
- Minimize the duration of a serious disruption to business operations;
- Facilitate effective coordination of recovery tasks; and
- Reduce the complexity of the recovery effort.

Business continuity is also about high availability. It is about maintaining the operation of the business in the event of a serious failure or disruption affecting a major enterprise business location.

For instance, an objective for deploying distributed data centers is to provide redundancy, scalability and high availability. Redundancy is the first line of defense against any failure. Redundancy within a data center is just as important as redundancy between data centers, including application servers, databases, and communication and network linkages. Maintaining a comprehensive and rigorous backup and restore capability is central to establishing a business continuance strategy.

In today's environment, the effects of a long-term Information Technology operations outage may be catastrophic. The development of a viable recovery strategy must, therefore, be a product not only of the providers of the organization's Information Systems, communications and operations center services, but also the users of those services and management personnel who have responsibility for the protection of the organization's assets.

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Fail-over and Recovery Goals and Objectives

Fail-over refers to rolling over the production IT operation to alternative servers, networks or locations, or to an alternative data center through automated and/or manual means. Recovery refers to the capability of restoring the primary production environment, such as the entire data center operation, if this is possible, and recovering the operations to the primary data center. The secondary data center or standby server or network environment reverts back to standby mode.

Establishing this fail-over and recovery capability forms the basis of the business continuity objectives:

- Rapid resumption of critical operations following the loss or inaccessibility of staff at the primary business and IT operations locations;
- Rapid resumption of critical operations following a wide-scale, regional disruption at the primary business and IT operations locations; and
- A high level of confidence (through ongoing use or robust testing) that critical internal and external continuity arrangements are effective and compatible.

The organization's business continuity principles should be consistent with cost effective, sound business operations and take into account the impact of the principle IT operations on the organization's various locations, customers, business partners and other stakeholders. These objectives consider the following elements of recovery:

- Recovery time expectations for each application component
- Tolerable data loss for each application component
- Recovery capacity or volume expectations
- Sound business continuity practices to support these objectives.

At a high level, the Business Continuity Plan should include adequate coverage of the following elements:

- Emergency response procedures appropriate to any incident or activity that may endanger lives, property, or the capability to perform essential functions.
- Arrangements, procedures, and responsibilities, including data backup, offsite storage and contingency safeguards, that ensure critical operations can be continued and that sensitive information

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can be protected if normal processing or data communications are interrupted for any reason for an unacceptable period of time.

- Recovery procedures and responsibilities to facilitate the rapid restoration of normal operations at the primary site, or if necessary, at the alternative data center facility, following the destruction, major damage or other interruptions at the primary site.
- Minimally acceptable prioritized level of degraded operation of critical systems or functions to guide implementation at the backup operational site. The business continuity plan must accommodate these established priorities.
- Interim manual processes to enable the continuance of critical operations in the absence of application, operational and general IT support.

A Business Continuity Plan lays out the steps and strategies to be followed in the event of a disaster or disruptive event. However, these plans are only theoretical until they are tested. Realistic testing must be conducted on a regular basis with the critical business functions of the organization. The business continuity plan should operationally tested at a frequency commensurate with the risk and magnitude of loss or harm that could result from the disruption of a critical IT application or communication function.

Further, the test plan only captures the current testing objectives and priorities at one point in time. It is the expectation that the plan is a living plan and should be updated during regular maintenance periods or when business events drive the need for new testing objectives.

Readiness

The development of the Business Continuity Plan is only one, albeit important, step in preparing the organization to maintain business continuity in the event of a disaster. A secondary purpose of business continuity planning process is to minimize the effect of disruptions. The organization must also be prepared by mitigating risks that would make recovery difficult no matter how good the business resumption plan is.

A Vulnerability Assessment, Risk Assessment and Readiness Assessment should be conducted regularly to ensure that the organization is prepared to activate this plan and mitigate the risks to the organization in the event there are disruptions large and small.

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Conclusion

Planning for the business continuity of an organization in the aftermath of a disaster is a complex task. Preparation for, response to, and recovery from a disaster affecting the administrative, financial and operational functions of the organization requires the cooperative efforts of many support organizations in partnership with the functional areas supporting the "business" of the organization. The Business Continuity Plan is your best tool and guidance to respond to and coordinate these efforts.

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About Ingenuity

Ingenuity (www.teamingenuity.com) provides business continuity planning, telecommunications and power optimization, telecommunications invoice management services, web development and information technology solutions to a diverse group of commercial, government, and non-profit customers through its operations in Alabama, Colorado and Georgia.

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