

Ensuring Business Survival

By Edward Vesely

Six years ago on September 11, 2001 I was tying the shoes of my six-year-old as she prepared for what should have been another cheerful, uneventful day at her elementary school. Instead we witnessed together the second airplane slamming into the World Trade Center. Since that moment, our world has changed dramatically.

My child likens these times to her *Series of Unfortunate Events* chapter books, letting me know in her own way that she understands bad things happen to good people and yet life goes on. Call me idealistic, but I am optimistic about her future and hold great hope that human resilience and ingenuity will overcome these challenges.

High Availability Solutions Defend Against "Unfortunate Events"

The term "high availability" refers to a business application or system being able to switch to a backup system and continue processing whenever problems occur on the primary production system. According to market research firm IDC, 10 percent of all servers shipped will be part of a high-availability solution by 2009, accounting for 22 percent of all server revenue. And they predict that the disk-based data protection market will grow to more than \$50 billion by 2010; those numbers include hardware and software.

Given this investment, executives want assurances that information assets—data and applications—can remain available no matter what happens to their production systems. And IT managers are being tasked to find ways to eliminate system downtime and ensure that their businesses remain highly available. There are four essential steps that can be taken to ensure business continuity and survival, from understanding the concepts of disaster recovery and information availability to calculating the business impact of downtime and selecting the right solution.

Step 1: Getting Started

Before you begin reviewing the technologies that support high availability, you first must consider the business. You need to identify which business processes are most important to keeping your business operational.

Once you have identified the most critical business processes, work with the business units to determine their availability requirements for each process. Document the requirements in an internal service level agreement that specifies the availability goals for each process and articulates the costs of not meeting the goals.



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Documenting the cost of not meeting availability requirements helps you determine the value of a software investment used to improve availability. This information also helps you prioritize the processes to analyze. After documenting the service levels required, you can start analyzing the availability needs of each business process technology by technology.

Step 2: Assess the Financial Impact—Calculate the Cost of Downtime

How much does downtime cost your business? The answer may not be as obvious as you think. Unexpected IT outages can unleash a procession of direct and indirect consequences both short term and far reaching. The dollar amount that can be assigned to each hour of downtime varies widely depending upon the nature of your business, the size of your company and the criticality of your IT systems to primary revenue generating processes.

[Businesses blaze in downtown Helsinki, Finland \(Photo by Jari Aho\)](#)

Step 3: Uptime and Business Resiliency—It's All About Recovery

Following any unplanned outage, how quickly must you have the organization up and running as close to normal business operations as possible? Remember, every minute costs you—take a look at your downtime cost per hour. Your recovery will depend on two objectives: your recovery time and your recovery point. These two measures will determine the optimum availability your organization will need.

1. Recovery Time Objective (RTO).

RTO defines how quickly you need to restore applications and have them fully functional again. The faster your RTO requirement, the closer you move to zero interruption in uptime and the highest availability requirements.

2. Recovery Point Objective (RPO).

RPO defines the point at which the business absolutely cannot afford to lose data. It points to a place in each data stream where information must be available to put the application or system back in operation. Again, the closer you come to zero data loss and continuous real-time access, the higher availability you will require.

You may have different RTOs and RPOs for each of your business critical applications. For example, a supply chain application that feeds a production plant may require a recovery time of only a few minutes with very minimal data loss.

Step 4: Select a Software Strategy for Successful Business Survival

When the real world costs of unplanned downtime are taken into account, an information availability solution is a cost-effective strategy for protecting businesses from serious injury. In particular, small to mid-sized businesses can benefit significantly from high availability solutions because they are generally more vulnerable to severe damage from unexpected outages and have fewer resources to stage a recovery.


A high availability solution shouldn't be hard work or beyond your budget. There are affordable, easy-to-manage solutions that provide significant benefits to small

and mid-sized businesses by minimizing the risks and consequences posed by unexpected IT outages. A high availability solution:

- Lowers the risk of significant costs to business such as lost revenue, productivity, legal penalties and brand damage caused by unplanned downtime
- Protects business relationships with customers, partners and suppliers by ensuring that applications and data will be available to satisfy their needs and unique schedules
- Enforces service level agreements by maintaining predictable RTOs and RPOs in the event of an IT outage
- Enhances ROI on existing resources by assuring they will be available to generate revenue and support business processes

- Ensures compliance with government and trade regulations by securing email and record retention requirements

In Closing

Certainly there are many internal and external factors that drive the decision to adopt one business continuity model over another. Every company should perform a business impact analysis and a risk assessment to determine exposure and requirements across the business, and then adopt a business continuity model that meets operational and financial objectives. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, "What people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can." 

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The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I like Internet poker. What's annoying are those Word messages that keep coming up saying, 'It looks like you're trying to raise on the flop with a garbage hand. Would you like some help?'"

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