

Business going well? It is time to think very carefully about continuity

In today's market, customers and employees alike expect to be fully connected to services, products and information anytime and anywhere. When this fails the consequences can be deeply damaging.

It gives the customer a terrible user-experience and generates low employee morale, badly affecting business in the short- and long-term.

In the worst case it can mean an organisation goes out of business.

Business continuity is designed to protect an organisation from such events. It encompasses a loosely-defined set of planning, preparatory and related activities that ensure an organisation's critical business functions will either continue to operate in the face of seriously disruptive incidents, or will be recovered to an operational state in a short period of time.

It includes three key elements, which are:

- **Resilience:** Critical business functions and the supporting infrastructure are designed and engineered in such a way that they are materially unaffected by most disruptions. This could be, for example, through the use of redundancy and spare capacity. This is the area where Hughes provides the solution.
- **Recovery:** Arrangements are made to recover or restore critical and less critical business functions that fail for some reason.
- **Contingency:** The organisation establishes a generalised capability and readiness to cope effectively with whatever major incidents and disasters occur, including those that realistically, cannot be foreseen. Contingency preparations constitute a last-resort response if resilience and recovery arrangements prove inadequate in practice.

The management of business continuity falls largely under risk management, with some cross-over into related fields such as governance, information security and compliance. Risk is a core consideration, since business continuity is primarily concerned with those business functions, operations, supplies, systems, relationships and so forth, that are critically important to achieving the organisation's operational objectives.

Any organisation should give business continuity its full attention. Analysts at Gartner put the average cost of downtime at more than £3,500 per minute and other surveys indicate that the norm for retailers is only marginally less.

Surprisingly, many businesses do not understand the full cost until a construction digger cuts through their DSL cable or flooding hits their neighbourhood.

These are easily understood threats, but the growth of cyber attacks and the risk of malicious activity by employees also put operations in jeopardy. A PwC report this year revealed that one in four UK companies has been under attack from cyber criminals in the past 2 years.

Unfortunately, too many companies have little idea how long they can survive without any connectivity and precious little understanding of how to provide themselves with effective continuity solutions.

Retail and hospitality

In retail this is all the more remarkable when we consider how enterprises are scrambling to become truly omni-channel in their operations, relying almost totally on their connectivity.

If store customers cannot gain access to prices or details, or even pay for the goods they want, they will depart and are unlikely to return soon, blaming the retailer for the problem.

In hospitality the effects of downtime can be even more acute. A business person in a hotel who suddenly finds he/she cannot use his/her laptop may well post a bad review on a prominent forum, leading to canceled bookings.

In addition, if aggregator sites are blocked, many potential customers searching for a room will go elsewhere.

Prioritising applications

In this context, businesses need to consider what among their applications and data is vital to their operations and then ensure it is backed up with a secondary connection so it is always available.

With this in mind, even though the business may be paying for a primary high-bandwidth circuit, it may be necessary to examine whether it requires a secondary high bandwidth circuit.

For a store operator, the primary applications may be those supporting payment cards and stock control, with a 3G or 4G backup connection sufficient for continuity.

Hotels may have a slight advantage, because their property management systems can run locally during downtime.

It is a question of working out the options. Does a hotel, for example, need a full-capacity backup or something more restricted, limited to supporting critical applications in the short-term until full connectivity is restored? Cost may be a factor, as the latter will generally require less expenditure.

Cloud backup

After considering its applications, an organisation must then consider if it needs to back up its data and if so, whether to do that locally or in the Cloud, or through a combination of the two.

The choice of Cloud gives remote access but will require data and applications to be loaded back up into the main site when primary connectivity is restored. On the other hand, if data is backed up locally, remote workers, such as sales staff, will be unable to access information if the business is hit by a connection failure.

When a disaster like a flood occurs, a business with Cloud backup can continue to operate more or less normally from temporary premises. Otherwise it could be facing a hefty bill for recovery of its applications and data, if indeed that is possible at all.

Hybrid solution

A hybrid approach is the most flexible and obvious solution to this problem, with some applications in the Cloud and others backed up on a local server, as it should give access to everyone if a site on the system goes down.

The aim is always to achieve the highest levels of availability at lowest cost in order to guarantee that critical applications remain functioning. In other words, it is possible to have a diverse range of connectivity services with a view to maintaining continuity.

What kind of connection?

When taking all these considerations into account, it is vital that businesses do not overlook the kind of connection they are paying for, as this will influence how effective their continuity is.

For example, most organisations with a fibre connection will find that the majority of interruptions to service are resolved within a day or even just a few hours.

On the other hand, if a business is in a flood-prone area, it may be at risk of losing connectivity for weeks or even months.

Organisations planning for these sorts of events, which used to be thought of as once-in-a-generation, but which are now more common, often believe they are protected if they have two separate lines of connectivity. However, in the majority of cases, these two lines will be routed to the same cabinet and equally vulnerable.

In this context, organisations need to start thinking about completely diverse forms of connection.

Managed services providers have the answers

It is here that experience and an open mind about solutions really count. A managed services provider, such as Hughes, for instance, can use its knowledge of the technology and market to ensure that lines with genuinely separate routing are supplied.

Where this is not available, an organisation may then find that 3G, 4G or satellite technology is the best option for ensuring continuity. Satellite in particular is suited to hospitality businesses operating remote premises, such as hotels or conference centres in rural areas, where obtaining even a single line of connectivity can be a challenge.

Satellite can deliver high-speed broadband access that kicks in automatically if landline broadband goes down. It gives blanket coverage and once the primary network fails, it is triggered automatically, using a roof-top antenna to route all traffic in accordance with a hotel or retail operator's wishes. The router will then return to the primary landline once service is restored.

Commercial sense

When it comes to business continuity, having a second line of connectivity, along with backup of applications and data ought to be viewed as a vital form of insurance, as necessary for a business as insuring a house is for homeowners.

It will be an additional cost, but compared with the vast impact of losing all connectivity for a day or a week, it really does make commercial sense.

Contact us at sales@hugheseurope.com or visit us at europe.hughes.com.

About Hughes

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