

DISASTER RECOVERY TIPS

Five questions to ask disaster recovery service providers

By Ray Lucchesi

09.22.2008

For many companies, disaster recovery (DR) and business continuity (BC) planning are rushed reactions to a disaster. Proactive DR and BC support can be established with relatively little time investment by employing DR outsourcing services from companies such as EDS, IBM, SunGard and others. Before choosing a DR service provider consider the following questions.

What RTO-RPO timeframes are offered by your service?

Most large DR outsourcers offer anything from a mirrored site with an RTO (recovery time objective) < 1 hour to time-share sites with an RTO-RPO (recovery point objective) > 48 hours. For mirrored sites, there are severe distance constraints and DR site storage equipment is typically dedicated to one organization. For time-share sites, tapes or other media are shipped to the DR site and outsourcers supply servers, storage and networking to use. Some outsourcers also offer shell sites with only raised floor, power and cooling that can have an RTO-RPO > 1 week. For shell sites, hardware must be shipped and installed prior to restoring applications and data.

What happens when a region wide disaster hits?

Time-share sites are first come-first served. Many outsourcers provide alternate DR sites to be used when a designated DR site is full. However, any telecommunications and/or networking bandwidth services previously dedicated to support designated DR site business requirements must be re-routed to the alternate site(s) at the outsourcer's expense.

DR outsourcers should actively manage regional disaster risk, especially with respect to a 25 mile wide disaster centered around the nearest large city. Most outsourcers either limit this risk by not offering more services than can be simultaneously supported or oversubscribe and yet offer enough alternate sites to cover regional disasters. Oversubscription rates also often impact DR test scheduling availability.

Are the designated and alternate DR sites high availability data centers?

The Uptime Institute, the industry leading data center certification authority, defines four tiers of data center sites as follows:

Five questions to ask disaster recovery service providers

- **Tier I** has basic infrastructure
- **Tier II** has redundant capacity components with single non-redundant distribution infrastructure
- **Tier III** has redundant capacity components and multiple independent distribution paths providing concurrently maintainable infrastructure
- **Tier IV** has fault tolerant infrastructure

Outsourcers should supply at least Tier III DR sites as defined by the Uptime Institute and should match or exceed the primary site availability level.

How much DR test time is supplied with your DR service?

Periodic tests or exercises are critical to any successful DR plan. Most contracts offer two days of test time per year but often more time can be purchased. Testing is critical in assuring the viability of the overall DR plan, both to the business as well as the outsourcer. Some service firms also offer detailed audits on DR exercises.

What hardware and software is supplied at the DR sites?

An outsourcer must supply hardware at DR sites compatible to hardware available at the primary data center. For instance, where data security is used at the primary site, compatible data encryption and key management services must be available at the DR site. Additionally, the outsourcer should supply software for all common operating systems and database servers. Special applications software is typically licensed to the primary data center owner and needs to be transferred to the DR site while running or testing there.

These five questions only constitute a starting point for an informed discussion with prospective outsourcers. More questions need to be asked regarding costs, DR and BC planning support, DR site personnel, etc. Disasters do happen – a DR plan using outsourced service providers may be a viable alternative.

© **TechTarget September 2008**

About the author

Ray Lucchesi is president of *Silverton Consulting*, a Storage, Strategy & Systems consulting services company, based in the USA offering products and services to the data storage community.

<mailto:info@silvertonconsulting.com>

<http://www.silvertonconsulting.com>