



Transaction Recovery

How to Ensure Continuity

By Tonya York

Throughout my career I have had a focus on ensuring the quality of transactions – those processes that we interact with in both our business and personal life. During my first job providing business continuity services to clients, I worked as a senior customer support manager for Comdisco Continuity Services, a business continuity and disaster recovery services provider, my day-to-day activities included supporting customers as they tested their business continuity and disaster recovery plans - teaching new customers how to use the services, supporting sales calls, and providing support for actual disasters declared in facilities. All this amounted to making sure customers could process their business transactions at our data centers and work area recovery offices during testing or an actual event. Transactions ranged from wires and trades to clothing inventory, shipping container orders and hospital registrations.

While in this role, I supported customers who had business interruptions resulting from the 1992 L.A. Riots; the 1993 World Trade Center Explosion; and the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. During these business interruptions, customers would redirect their telecommunications networks to our offices, send their backup tapes to our hot sites, send their IT staff to recover the computer environments and data, and in general, would try to conduct business as usual. In some cases their customers might know they had a problem, and in many cases the customers were unaware of any disruptions.

So how do you guarantee that you can recover transactions that are required for your organization to execute its critical business functions?

First, start by understanding “what are the functions your business must do to keep the doors open during a business interruption?” For organizations that are governed by Sarbanes-Oxley, you could start with your critical processes. For the most part, these are usually financial, since SOX is focused on financial controls. Meet with representatives of the various business functions to identify those activities that must be done to keep your organization viable during a business interruption. Determine how long these functions can be down and what your interdependencies are with other departments or external third parties.

Second, identify the information technology infrastructure and applications that are required to keep those transactions occurring. Determine how long the infrastructure and applications can be down, and how much data you can afford to lose while still performing your critical business functions. These times are known as Recovery Time Objective (maximum acceptable downtime) and Recovery Point Objective (maximum acceptable data loss). Get these timeframes approved by executive management. Remember these will be the requirements for your recovery environment and will result in a financial investment, so it's imperative that they are correct.

Third, use the data from the second step to develop recovery strategies to meet the requirements. This can be anything from establishing

a second call center to taking the phone calls being redirected from the impacted location to putting a hot site arrangement in place to recover your data center. It is usually best to provide several alternatives and costs for review and approval by management.

Once that is done, the fourth step is to write a business continuity/disaster recovery plan that will provide directions as to how you use your recovery strategy to meet your recovery point and time objectives (the requirements to support your critical business functions).

Finally, it's time to test your plan. Results from the test will either confirm the ability to deliver to the requirements - such as bringing up the loan origination system within 24 hours – or it will indicate further work is needed if the 24-hour timeframe cannot be met. If the latter is the case, the cycle starts over again - will the business unit accept a longer timeframe? Or do you have to come up with another strategy to meet the 24-hour requirement?

If this process is followed, organizations can be certain their critical transactions - whether they are MP3 files sold over the Internet, checks cashed, or hospital services rendered - will be processed during a business interruption, and you'll sleep better knowing you've done your part to protect the future of your company and the community in which it operates.

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