How to Become a Resilient IT Organisation – Getting Maximum Benefit from Disaster Recovery

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Biography

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Amy Hawthorne serves as iland's (www.iland.com) Vice President of Marketing and is responsible for driving global marketing strategy and execution. She is responsible for all aspects of marketing, including marketing communications, product marketing, demand generation, and channel marketing.

Ms. Hawthorne is an accomplished marketing leader having held leadership roles at technology companies like Phunware, a mobile app platform company, and Rackspace, home of Fanatical Support. She has an extensive background in B2B Marketing bringing 15+ years of experience in go-to-market strategy development, messaging and positioning and revenue-driving demand generation. She has been named a Top 10 Marketer in Austin, Texas and a mentor to up and coming B2B marketers.

In addition to her passion for marketing, she serves on the Board of Directors for Art From the Streets, an organisation helping homeless artists get back on their feet.
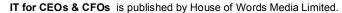
Abstract

As reliance on technology has increased, so has the expectation that it will always be available when we need it to run our businesses, homes and lives. Today, an unplanned system outage is more than a minor inconvenience. It can lead to reputation damage, lost revenues, fines and even legal action. So, it's not surprising that a whole industry has developed around protecting businesses and getting them quickly back up and running should the worst happen – and we're really rather good at it, explains the author of this article.

Introduction

Limiting Disaster Recovery (DR) to just "keeping the lights on" when unplanned outages occur ignores the vast potential of today's cloud-based DR to empower organisations' strategic IT programmes. We need to look past the panic button and see how the environments created in case disaster strikes, can be used proactively for everything from development, testing and network upgrades, all the way to cloud migration itself.   Instead of focusing on just disaster recovery, we should now be talking IT resiliency.

IT resiliency offers organisations the ability to accelerate transformation by adapting to change, while still protecting the business from disruption. It gives organisations

the confidence to embrace change, safe in the knowledge that there is a safety net if they need it. While the cloud isn't the silver bullet for every challenge in IT – however much we might want that to be true - in this case it really does answer the question of "how am I going to become a resilient IT organisation?"

The democratisation of Disaster Recovery

Disaster recovery used to be a costly affair; the preserve of organisations with large pockets that could afford to create a replica physical environment located on a second site, complete with staff to manage it. As users' expectations around availability have increased however, DR has become a necessity, not a luxury. Unfortunately, IT budgets have not grown to match. But the advent of cloud has reduced costs and made effective DR accessible to many more organisations.

This is because virtualisation has enabled a far easier DR solution. It has eliminated the need for IT managers to spend so much of their time managing (and paying for) physical resources such as servers, cables and buildings. Instead, in the cloud-based DR environment you only pay for the resources you use, plus you have the expertise of your cloud service provider to draw on for advice on the optimum set-up - rather than having to scope it yourself.

All of this means you are free to focus just on delivering business value; developing IT resiliency constitutes the next phase of that value for today's organisations.

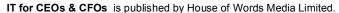## Using the DR environment for planned outages and system upgrades

Not all outages are unplanned. Businesses are evolving all the time and IT departments are constantly working to upgrade and develop the IT environment. Today, however, you can't just stick up a notice in the shop window saying "closed for refurbishment" as we live in an "always on" culture where the expectation is one of continuity and minimal disruption to services.

So, you need a process which keeps systems in operation while you carry out the essential upgrade work. That is where your replica DR environment comes in, allowing you to fail over whatever you are going to work on into the replica environment and have it continued business as usual while you make the change. Then, when you are ready, you fail back and the upgrade has taken place without disruption to the business.

Strategic safety net

Whenever you need to change your systems there is always the risk that things might go awry, so it makes sense to undertake testing first – and where better to test new patches and OS updates than in an exact replica of your live environment?

That exact replica is also valuable when it comes to testing new projects and ideas. If you build a clean test environment it won't have all the "quirky" VMs that have evolved in your live environment over the years. This means that a project may work perfectly in the test environment but come unstuck when it lands in your warts-and-all production environment. Testing in the replica environment gives you the chance to accommodate those eccentric anomalies before there is any impact on the live environment.

Similarly, you can do vulnerability scans and penetration testing in the replica environment, so you can assess your security situation without disrupting the live environment.

Supporting a regular testing schedule

In the past, DR testing was something that happened once a year – if you were lucky – over a long weekend. You had to be back up and running before the weekend was over so if you did find anything concerning you didn't have much chance to fix it. The beauty of cloud-based DR is that you can run a recovery test in the replica environment over your lunch break and come back to a full report detailing the performance of every part of your DR plan and recovery orchestration.

That detailed report means you don't just know that your business will come back online in the event of a disaster, you know exactly how it will come back online – in which order applications will come back up and how long they will take. Then you can decide if everything is working appropriately and make changes if necessary.

Smoothing the path to the cloud

When you use cloud for backup and DR, you replicate your on-premise environment in the cloud. Effectively all you then need to do to carry out cloud migration is to re-protect your environment to a second cloud location and you are up and running as a cloud-enabled business, with all the benefits that offers. You can have the same visibility and control over your cloud environment as you do over your on-premise systems, whilst also enjoying all the flexibility and scalability that the cloud has to offer.

These are just some of the ways in which organisations can go beyond seeing DR as something that's only useful in an emergency, and instead utilise it to power real business transformation and become a truly resilient IT organisation.