Facilitate Your Recovery – Your Plan Is Incomplete without a Work Group Facility

By Ted Brown| January 15th, 2007

This article was published more than a decade ago. We've not changed it, to indicate even back then, working from home or somewhere other than a traditional office made sense. Covid-19 proved that. But what about the next disaster?

Your organization might have a superb disaster recovery plan that you successfully test twice a year, but that doesn't mean you have a business continuity plan.

Traditionally, disaster recovery has meant recovering technology. DR plans often take advantage of things like hot sites, alternate sites, quick ship and mobile recovery centers. Business continuity, on the other hand, is focused on the business as a whole and not just IT.

You don't have a business continuity plan unless it contains a facility plan for where and how business units – the heart of any organization – would continue to function in the event of a disruption. Even some of the very best DR plans don't include a plan for the IT work group. In other words, where do the systems programmers, application programmers, DBAs, and all of your other IT staff go to continue to work? That's why you need a work group recovery plan.

For example, at a recent meeting of business continuity professionals, a hot site provider presented recovery statistics illustrating the dramatic increase in work group contracts and recoveries. Since 1999, more than 50 percent of the declarations sent to the hot site provider have been in the work group area. This demonstrates how important it is to have a work group recovery plan in place.

What, then, makes a good work group recovery plan? There are eight important elements, including:

1. It allows you to recover the supporting IT functions
2. It provides for communication with the primary recovery site
3. It provides for an alternative facility with workspace
4. It provides desktop PC replacements
5. It allows you to recover or restore data and hard drives
6. It allows you to restore software
7. It provides phones, faxes and copiers

8. It provides people support functions (i.e. parking, sufficient rest rooms, cafeteria, etc.)

Where do you look for a recovery site? Let's examine the pros and cons of the alternatives to solve your remote work group facility recovery problem.

Hot Site Vendors

The major hot site providers have many work group recovery centers throughout the US, but they're not in every city and may not have enough "seats" in the smaller markets. They can provide a partial solution, but there is a risk of them filling up in a regional disaster. It happened after Hurricane Katrina.

PROS: A single vendor solution, with consistency and standards, that's easily tested, staffed by experienced recovery professionals, with depth of alternative locations, excellent people bench strength and the best communication between your main hot site and among the work group recovery centers.

CONS: Not in every city, less flexible contracts, terms and conditions (T's and C's) and pricing.

Mobile Recovery Centers

These are trailers you can take anywhere. They solve the "not a covered city" problem that occurs with hot site vendors. They may solve the quantity of seats problem, especially in conjunction with a hot site. But, they may or may not bring power with them, which is a problem in a major regional power outage. They also may not be able to travel in a regional destructive disaster and they need a "hitching post" to join a network when they arrive. Finally, using one means it takes longer than a fixed recovery center to restore operations. It's a harder and more expensive solution to test.

PROS: Single vendor work group recovery solution, aligned with the major hot site providers, consistency and standards, virtually unlimited number of seats, can be in any city.

CONS: Longer recovery time due to travel, could be limited in a destructive disaster, may require external power, may require a hitching post for communications, may be local ordinance placement issues, difficult and expensive to test. Typically, not staffed.

Local Single Site Recovery Provider

There are more than 200 recovery centers in the US alone. Most of them you've never heard of and many are more like gathering places than recovery centers. They can be a viable alternative, especially in remote small markets, but be sure to inspect them. They may have desks with no PCs or phones. Ensure they have good power and communications and there is something to test.

PROS: Local existing facility in virtually every city, easy and inexpensive to test, flexible T's and C's, may be lowest cost vendor solution.

CONS: Most inconsistent solution, little track record, may or may not be staffed, many contracts when there is only one per city. Be sure of what technology it provides.

Another Location Within Your Organization

This is an excellent, cost-effective solution if implemented correctly with a documented, tested plan. But you must add additional resources such as technology, desks, etc. And, if this remote office is hundreds of miles away or greater from the disaster, it does not solve the people issues of the work group users.

PROS: Under your organization's control, test anytime, no conflict in a regional disaster and company standards and skills.

CONS: When done properly, this option is likely to be the most expensive solution; biggest issue is that it's probably too far away.

Disaster Recovery vs Business Continuity

- Disaster recovery historically focused on recovering technology. Therefore hot sites, alternate sites, quick ship and mobile recovery centers were developed.
- Since the 1990's, the focus has been on business continuity, not just technology recovery. This is even more true since 9/11. IT disaster recovery is now a subset of business continuity.

Teleworking

According to ITAC, teleworking is working from anywhere but a traditional office. It could be at home, at a client's, in your hotel room or at a coffee shop. Teleworking, as a BCP solution, solves a lot of the work group people issues. It may be a more expensive solution than most of those discussed so far, and while it solves a number of issues, it does create others. The

technical issues are easy to solve. Security issues are challenging but solvable. The HR issues are harder (e.g., does a non-exempt employee working from home get overtime? Are the employees eligible for compensation if injured while working from home? The answer to both questions is probably yes). Some management will object because they can't easily supervise workers.

PROS: Solves most people concerns, tested frequently using production, available in every market; may provide the most productivity by replacing commute time with work time.

CONS: HR issues, security issues, costs.

So what is the right solution? There isn't just one. But we believe teleworking must be part of every work group recovery solution for either the most critical resources (because we want them recovered the fastest) or the least critical (because they don't make the cut to go to the recovery center). And in the end, a good business continuity plan that's going to protect many remote locations is probably going to include all of these solutions. One size does not fit all.

About the Author About the Author About the Author Ted Brown, CBCP CBCV MBCI, is President & CEO of KETCHConsulting, a rapidly growing International BCP Consulting Firm. Ted was elected to the Contingency Planning & Management Hall of Fame in 2002; KETCHConsulting was elected in 2007. He was awarded both the Consultant of The Year and Lifetime Achievement Awards in 2017. He is a frequent speaker at all major Business Continuity Conferences, speaking on a variety of subjects. KETCHConsulting's team includes all senior, certified (CBC/COOPP/MBC/COOPI), experienced consultants. There are many issues not discussed in this article. If you'd like to discuss them further or need consulting help, Ted can be reached at tedbrown@ketchconsulting.com or 1-888-538-2492, or 484-919-2966.