Disaster Recovery – Is it really necessary?

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That's a really good question, until it's three in the morning and there hasn't been a good backup in about a week. A lot of people who really don't understand computers and Information Technology think it's a waste of time and energy to worry about disaster recovery, but do they know that the whole company will not work if the computers are down? In layman's terms it means that someone will be losing money or even worse if the IT infrastructure goes down.

If a disaster were to hit your business would you be prepared? Most businesses, especially small businesses, would not. Only a small number of companies today have a formal disaster recovery plan in place. A disaster plan could save companies thousands of dollars. Pre-planning for a disaster could save a company's livelihood.

What, would constitute a disaster? The answer may seem obvious; fires, floods, and burglary. But there are other events that can adversely affect your ability to conduct business. Volcanic eruptions and the accompanying dust and/or earthquakes, can wipe out a company, as can computer crashes and even some computer viruses. Since these events may also impact your business they too should be considered disasters. Remember 9/11, probably something we will never forget, but were the lessons learned? I still talk to people in small businesses that think it won't happen to them and I hope it doesn't, but it just may. Each and every business should work on a disaster recovery plan for your particular area and don't stop at the IT infrastructure.

Failing to plan is planning to fail, might an old cliché, but not having a specific outline of what to do in the case of a disaster leaves too many issues open to conjecture. With a good Plan in place, your company is much more likely to survive a serious interruption in business. A written formal Plan is much more likely to be followed than one that has never been formalized. This is one of the major reasons why large corporations spend millions of dollars annually on Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity planning. It doesn't take a lot of money, however, to have a good Plan. There are plenty of places on the web that offer sample plans, and great articles on how to plan for the inevitable. If you don't have a Plan in place or even if you currently have one, here are some issues to consider, which may help you

First, review your insurance policy. Does it provide for loss of income after a disaster? What kinds of disasters are covered? Will it provide for equipment replacement and especially will it provide for equipment rental and software while you try to get your business running again. Will it cover re-entering lost electronic data, which can be very time consuming? Will it cover renting or relocating your business?

Next, outline what disasters can be reasonably expected to occur in your area, including computer viruses, and plan for them. For instance, if your building burns down, you'll want something in writing that states where you'll set up your temporary offices and who to contact to do so, where you'll get your new computers, etc. You might also include a checklist of agencies to contact, including names and emergency numbers, such as your insurance agent, Phone Company, DSL provider, and the post office. The purpose of the list is to allow you to transfer the necessary services and functions to your new location, in an orderly manner. Going by a checklist also ensures that nothing is left out. More should hold the checklists that one person and a couple kept offsite with recent backups. If it's equipment or a service you need in order to run your business, put it on the checklist.

Many will find this task very time consuming and daunting. But if you need motivation to get it done, write down the impact one or more of theses disasters would have on your business. A serious computer crash, for example, could wipe out all of your Accounts Receivables, Accounts Payables, and your customer list. Loss of your A/R may jeopardize your ability to collect money from those owing you. Further, loosing these records, especially you're A/R, A/P and customer list will cause most companies to go out of business. Businesses that depend on computers may fold after a serious business interruption. With each passing day you are not up and running, the probability that you will stay in business decreases dramatically. Preparing a Plan, Testing Plan, and putting it in Motion will significantly increase the odds that you will survive a disaster.

The best way to survive a disaster is to expect the unexpected and plan for it. That includes performing regular backups of all your important computer data and keeping it in a fireproof safe offsite with your Disaster Recovery Plan.