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Required Reading for

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Focus on:IT  
By: Shanna Yetman

# BEFORE DISASTER STRIKES

A MASSIVE HURRICANE OR A COFFEE SPILL CAN JEOPARDIZE YOUR BUSINESS. YOU NEED BACK UP.

When torrential downpours and citywide flooding hit New Orleans last August, some companies fared better than others. The companies that were able to continue working through Hurricane Katrina had invested in a business continuity plan. Adams and Reese, a law firm located in the heart of downtown New Orleans had such a plan.

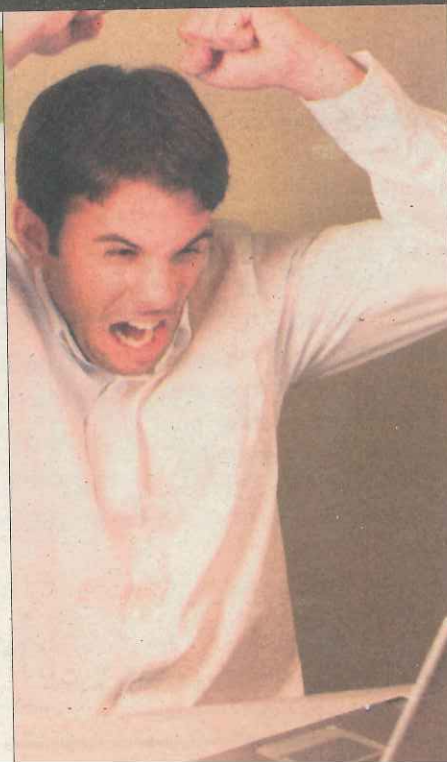
Paul D'Arcy, vice president of marketing at MessageOne, an Austin, Texas-based company that specializes in business continuity, explains. "The attorneys at this law firm were able to use our back up e-mail system to correspond with a company in Baton Rouge and sign a lease for a temporary office outside of the storm's impact area." Adams and Reese invested the time and money to ensure that they would be able to operate in the event of any disaster, and you should to. Whether it's a natural disaster that leaves you scrambling to find a safe place to house your employees or that coffee that now lies in ruins over your laptop; the unexpected happens.

"I tell my clients that it is not a matter of if a data disaster will happen, but when it will happen," comments Dana Stibolt, president and owner of MacMedics, a company with an office in Washington, DC that specializes in Macintosh consulting service and support. With this philosophy in mind, many IT companies are now offering creative business continuity plans that will keep you connected to your clients before, during and after a crisis.

## Your server has GONE NUTS

When a data disaster happened to Iver Nielson, senior director of management information systems at the National Retail Federation, he just couldn't believe the timing. With only three days left before one of the NRF's biggest conferences of the year; their Microsoft Exchange Server went down. This meant a complete e-mail outage. For the 17,000 vendors and attendees preparing for the show, e-mail communication was essential.

"This was the first time our e-mail system ever went down," comments Nielson. However, because of the 24/7 monitoring by MessageOne, Nielson knew about the outage right away. "I received a call at 2 a.m. from MessageOne stating that my e-mail server



was down. I gave approval for them to move forward with evaluating the problem and providing a failover if needed."

Early the next morning, Nielson provided a preliminary warning of the problem to his executives. By the time he reached his office, there was a voice-mail waiting for him from MessageOne saying that the problem with the Microsoft Exchange Server had been identified and resolved.

According to a recent study on e-mail outages conducted by MessageOne there is a 75 percent likelihood of an unplanned e-mail outage. Furthermore, only 14 percent of these outages are caused by natural disasters. This means that most e-mail outages are caused by technology failures: Failures of server hardware, loss of connectivity and database corruption ranked top on the list. "These are not small e-

mail outages either," says D'Arcy. "They typically average around 20 hours."

The business continuity plan that the NRF invested in was MessageOne's product called OneSwitch. OneSwitch provides replication and failover, a backup operation that automatically switches to a standby server if the primary system fails or is temporarily shut down, for Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SQL Server and Windows File and Print Services at the push of a button. In other words, when Nielson authorized MessageOne to provide a failover, he would be able to automatically redirect requests from his failed server to a backup system without anyone noticing.

"E-mail is one of the most important business applications today," comments D'Arcy. "Our focus is to make



sure that the company continues to communicate with their clients through an e-mail outage."

## What about **PLANNED OUTAGES**?

A business continuity plan is just for unexpected events. It can also help you through planned outages of your network. Referring back to MessageOne's study on e-mail outages; planned network outages account for 14.3 percent of outages in an office. Many reasons for these types of outages can be cited including a data center or office move, a planned power outage, regular system maintenance, required patch management and disaster recovery testing. However, planned outages tend to last a little longer, 36.1 hours on average.

Steve Taylor, chief technology officer of Plan B Technologies, a full service IT solutions provider based in Bowie, MD, recalls when one of their clients was scheduled for a network outage. "We recently helped one of our clients through a five day scheduled power outage. This particular company had data centers in both Annapolis and Dallas. The power outage occurred in the Dallas office and for this company that meant that almost 500 users would be unable to have access to any of their applications for that time period."

Fortunately for the company, Plan B's Network Appliance Technology allowed all of the data that was stored in Dallas to be rerouted to Annapolis. The company was able to have the scheduled power outage in Dallas without losing any data whatsoever.

Many of the IT firms that offer services like Plan B cater toward small or medium size companies that have a limited amount of money to spend on technology infrastructure and business continuity plans. "Plan B Technologies has a wide focus and we do offer consulting services. We specialize in all Microsoft applications, we help companies secure their network and monitor signs for an incoming attack as well as help companies store their data in compliance with certain regulations like HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act]," says Taylor.

One product that Plan B boasts of is an application that takes snapshots of a company's data at certain times during the day. In the event of a data disaster, they are able to use these snapshots to replicate the data back to that particular point.

## Could that 20-ounce coffee **REALLY RUIN MY MAC?**

According to Stibolt of MacMedics, one of the major problems with data disasters is that people do not save their data in more than one spot. "The key to safeguarding data is to always have the data stored in two places at once. Having a data disaster is an eventuality. It will happen to you." MacMedics deals with the more common disasters that an individual computer owner might experience: like spilling coffee on a laptop.

Stibolt recalls one story in particular. "Very recently, we had a researcher from Johns Hopkins University come to us in a panic. He had spilled his 20 ounce coffee all over his laptop, and was not only upset because he didn't get to enjoy the coffee, but because he had not saved his research in any other spot." Luckily, for the researcher MacMedics was able to save the computer and the files.

"Once the laptop became available, more people started having data disasters," says Stibolt. "With a portable computer the chance is greater that it will be stolen, dropped or mishandled in some way. In a way, the desktop computer provided security, because it stayed at home," Stibolt says.

With portable technology like iPods becoming so commonplace, many people are concerned with protecting their digital assets (photos, purchased music, etc.) This is why Stibolt stresses saving your files in two places.

Stibolt describes their process of data recovery. "Eighty-five percent of what the client considers a data disaster is an overreaction. What we do is we take a look at the computer and diagnose the problem. Is it a physical (hardware problem) or a mental (software problem.) If the unit can be fixed in our laboratory that would be a standard repair cost of \$139. If it can't be fixed in house, we know exactly who to send it to."

MacMedics deals in only Macintosh products, but they can do almost anything when it comes to repairing a Mac. MacMedics stresses that all data recovery doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg and be in a "clean room environment." In fact, most data recovery situations don't require it.

Whether you are an individual who needs a simple hard drive replacement or a company that needs to come up with a successful business continuity plan, they are many products and companies to turn to. And don't forget to save your data in more than one spot.

**CEO**

**What will you do when the power goes out?**

**Start your emergency preparedness now.**

### **For your business:**

- Prevent data loss on servers and computers.
- Maintain internet and phone connectivity for your customers and employees.
- Ensure continuous operation of security, surveillance and building access systems.
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