

IT Management Overconfident About Disaster Recovery

Many corporate IT operations are underprepared and overconfident about their ability to handle a disaster, survey finds.

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Six years after the events of 9/11, many corporate IT operations are overconfident about their ability to handle a disaster, according to a Forrester Research, Inc. report released on Tuesday.

The survey of 189 data center decision makers found a severe lack of IT preparation for natural and manmade disasters.

For example, the report found that 27 percent of the respondents' data centers in North America and Europe do not run a failover site to recover data in the event of a disaster. About 23 percent of respondents said they do not test disaster recovery plans, while 40 percent test their plans at least once a year. About 33 percent of respondents described their operations as "very prepared" for a manmade or natural disaster while 37 percent called their sites simply "prepared" for such events.

Stephanie Balaouras, a senior analyst at Cambridge, Mass.-based Forrester, said she was surprised at how "overly confident" enterprises are about their ability to confront disasters when their preparation is actually minimal.

"Without regular testing, the chance that your disaster recovery plan will execute flawlessly during a disaster is pretty slim," said Balaouras, who authored the report. "The last thing you want is to have no idea how to recover" from a disaster.

Balaouras said that many enterprises are leery of conducting tests of disaster recovery plans because they can be disruptive to the operation of a data center. For example, testing could require key production applications to be taken offline for some time, she said.

And as budgets continue to tighten, IT operations and infrastructure staff face growing challenges to justify spending on disaster recovery programs and testing, Balaouras noted. Companies can validate such programs by determining the potential cost of downtime during disasters, including revenue lost by not closing monthly books on time, due to late payment costs and to lost worker productivity, she said.

Forrester said that many companies must scramble to create disaster recovery programs as partners and strategic suppliers increasingly require the corporations they deal with to have redundant systems running offsite.

The researcher also contended that companies should have an easier time creating such operations today due to improvements server virtualization technology, the availability of larger bandwidth pipes, declining telecommunications costs and storage area network (SAN)-based replication.

"That alternate site doesn't have to be just idle. You can read your read only workloads there, like reporting, or have secondary workloads like application development and testing, or you can offload backup," remarked Balarouas.