

Disaster Recovery

The second installment of a two part article to help small companies and individuals with Disaster Preparation and Recovery.

So, do I have your attention now? Last month, the disaster preparation article came out about a week after the Hurricane Dennis scare, so you should be well aware of the necessity of good disaster planning. Locate your copy of the July Mississippi Business Journal to read the preparation article or download it from my website (see below). Disaster recovery can be a nightmare, but if you do your preparation right, it can be little more than an inconvenience. This article assumes that you have followed the advice presented in the previous article on preparation.

Disaster Recovery can be broken down into three basic phases – Damage Assessment, Interim Operation and Final Recovery. We will briefly discuss each phase.

The storm has passed. You have cut the trees from your driveway and arrived at your office. Before you can recover, you have to know what has happened, so assess the damage done to your facility and determine how long it will take before you are fully operational. You may be one of the lucky ones who only needs to wait for the electricity to return or you may have significant damage. In order to determine how much time and energy should be invested in the Interim Operations phase of your recovery, you need to know how long you are going to be waiting for your facility. Determine how much of your system was damaged or destroyed and start building a shopping list. Some of your systems may need to be special ordered, so getting a list of hardware needs and placing the order should be one of your very first tasks. For the purpose of the rest of this article, we are going to assume you found nothing but a slab where your office used to be, so you will be in interim operations for a while.

In order for your business to operate, you need to have a place to work and you need to be able to communicate with your customer base. It is amazing how much work you can do from the kitchen table when it is absolutely necessary. Have your phone company forward your business calls to your cell phone, plug in your computer and press the ON switch. If you were using the laptop disaster preparation method described last month, you have just completed the Interim Operations step of your disaster recovery. Congratulations! You can take a break while I chat with those who did not.

Since you did not use the laptop method, you will have to set up a computer basically from scratch. Perhaps it is your home system or a system you purchased when you saw your office foundation slab. Either way, you will probably spend the next four to eight hours getting your software loaded and your backups restored. Hopefully the laptop method does not look quite as expensive now.

So, now you have your phones and a system. You can stay in touch with your customer base, continue to pay bills and, more importantly, issue and collect invoices. Depending on the size of your business, this may work well for quite a while. If not, you'll need to

find temporary office space. (You can already see why a disaster and recovery plan is as unique as the company for which it is written.) Since the only difference between Final Recovery and setting up a long term temporary operation is location and scope, we will fast forward to Final Recovery.

The office space has been repaired or rebuilt. Your new network is in place and ready to plug in your new computers. Because you planned ahead and saved all of the license information in a safe location, you saved on the order of \$200 to \$500 PER COMPUTER by not having to purchase new software or operating systems (Remember the big plastic box from last month's article?). With those savings, you were able to tell the hardware supplier to put in a little bit faster processor and a lot more memory. Your end users will thank you for the increase in performance. Now, you just need to come in with your laptop, plug it into the network and copy all of the data onto your new server.

This scenario sounds almost nonchalant. That's because this company built a disaster recovery plan and actually followed it. Yes, it is a bit cumbersome to put together a plan for your company. Yes, it can be a hassle to make sure the backups are done each night and yes, it can be a little pricey to have a laptop dedicated to maintaining an operational copy of your entire business management and office document system. Yes, it all sounds like a royal pain, but which would be worse? Designing and implementing your disaster preparation and recovery plan? Or... taking eight months worth of soggy sales orders and invoices and to your accounting department and asking your people to rekey them?

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