The Definition of Recovery Time
The definition of ‘recovery time’ in disaster recovery

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The majority of companies that have a business continuity plan will have decided on a recovery time objective (RTO) based on the maximum length of time the business can afford to be without their IT systems. When it comes to looking for a provider to meet those objectives, understanding what potential suppliers mean by their definition of recovery time is highly important.

Plan B hosted a discussion with industry leading disaster recovery specialists to gain a feel of what the standard definition of recovery time is. The results highlight some very grey areas which could have a big impact on business operations if the recovery time is not properly defined.

Over 50% of the specialists we talked to classed recovery time as the time taken to achieve minimum business continuity objectives (MCBO). On describing MCBO, experts stated it was the point at which:

- IT systems are at some level of capability
- IT systems are returned to service regardless of status or quality
- The business is able to continue without maximum productivity
- IT turns a system over to QA.

This means that the system is booted with software applications and data loaded on and the data can be seen- so is viable. Companies will be less than 100% productive at recovery, and one company stated 30% productivity in 2 days would be an acceptable recovery time.

It is the work that is done after MCBO has been achieved though that enables employees to regain productivity and gives full “return to service” capability. This includes configuring software packages to fully integrate, and user’s profiles with access rights on individual devices to work the way they had prior to the incident. Then there are security protocols, DNS, drivers, kernel and HAL to think about. Finally there’s the testing phase.

This is the part that takes hours of engineering time, and adds days onto the recovery time - hence why it won’t be included by most companies in their recovery time SLA’s. It is the most challenging element of a disaster recovery service provider’s service as they will need, at short notice, to have a large engineer output. Logistically this is difficult to always get right.

SUMMARY

When defining your Recovery Time Objective, ensure that you also define what level of productivity is acceptable. This can then form the basis of a discussion with potential providers, and SLA agreements. As long as both parties’ expectations are understood then you shouldn’t encounter any
problems with the recovery time objective being met. It is also worth asking a provider what their 'return to service' time and guarantee is.

CONTACT PLAN B
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