

## A brief history - from disaster recovery through business continuity to Information Availability

The complexities of the business world today mean that protecting your business against interruption must involve more than disaster recovery. A fiercely competitive global marketplace and increased consumer expectations have reduced our tolerance for downtime. We look at how contingency planning has evolved from its infancy as disaster recovery through to business continuity management and, now, Information Availability.

While operators of computing environments in the 1950s and 60s realised the need to keep backup copies of critical data, the concept of disaster recovery did not really emerge until the late 1970s when the first standby systems and datacentres were established, primarily concerned with mainframe systems. In the event of failure recovery of systems within 5 days and a few days' data loss was considered acceptable!

The 1990s saw PCs give individuals more processing power on their desk than had been available in the entire world only a few years before. As companies strove to capitalise on the technology available to them more applications were developed and run on decentralised systems distributed throughout the enterprise. The way these applications interact, with information flowing between systems, applications and departments, created a host of new vulnerabilities from communications failure to human error. Any break in the flow of information between the systems now had ramifications throughout the business. As planners sought to understand and mitigate these risks the concept of business continuity evolved.

Business continuity takes a holistic view of the business, recognising that having data available on an IT system is of little use if there is no way for people to connect and interact with it. Organisations need the restoration of voice and data communications, alternative premises and people familiar with the recovery plan to keep business continuing as normally as possible in the face of adversity. Disaster recovery is now associated with the narrow issue of data recovery following a systems outage and is just one small aspect of business continuity.

The massive expansion of the Internet since the late 1990s, just in time manufacturing and the growth in mobile working has developed business continuity into Information Availability – the concept of keeping people and information connected. Businesses are now visible, and need to be accessible, every hour of every day. Consumers now expect to be able to purchase goods and services any time, anywhere, so retailers need to be assured that their supply chain can continue to deliver. Adding to higher expectations, increased regulation and new industry standards mean that business continuity is no longer a 'nice to have' but a business imperative.

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