

PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED *D*

← Organisations in the Middle East have slowly gained awareness of the need for business continuity, but awareness does not always equate to preparedness.

A COMBINATION OF GREATER AWARENESS, POLITICAL UNREST AND REGULATION ARE ENCOURAGING COMPANIES TO ADOPT DISASTER RECOVERY AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY SOLUTIONS

BY KERI ALLAN

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Bailey: Multinationals must comply with local BC requirements.



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isaster recovery (DR) is gaining significant ground in the region as organisations begin to prioritise data protection and focus on good corporate governance and overseas regulations. Research from eHosting DataFort has shown that companies across the Middle East are looking to improve their DR capabilities, with nearly 25% of those surveyed planning to commission an external data centre service provider to create a disaster recovery site.

Awareness of business continuity (BC) management and DR is definitely increasing in the minds of senior management; however, maturity and readiness of companies' programs still needs to improve.

A recent EMC report found that 82% of companies surveyed across the Middle East, Turkey and Morocco are not very confident that they can fully recover systems and data in the event of a disaster and 64% have lost data or suffered downtime in the last 12 months.

"Customers are aware of the need for disaster recovery; however, they need to relook at their overall strategy," highlights Walid Gomaa, business unit and sales manager, HP Storage Division. "We see some policies and documents are in place but when it comes to real implementations, things are different.

"This gap can be addressed by creating a comprehensive strategy supported by documentation about the why, how, when and where; then testing it to ensure that when there is a need to switch to the disaster recovery site, the strategy is proven to be working," he adds.

The growth of interest in DR/BC is partly due to worldwide events over the last decade, which have driven businesses to think differently about 'what we do in the event of' scenarios.

"We believe that any time there are significant social, political, geological or weather related events that occur in a region, companies re-evaluate their IT risk management strategy. This has occurred in other regions as well, such as Japan after

IS CLOUD MAKING DR EASIER?

The quick answer to the above question is yes. Many organisations, however, are not yet aware of the benefits and adoption is slow. It can especially be of use to smaller companies.

"Cloud based storage and DR solutions are particularly well-suited to smaller firms which face challenges with budgets and extensive IT resources," says Sachin Bhardwaj of eHosting DataFort.

"Some of the main benefits of using the cloud include more flexible pricing options and faster recovery, with easier, more frequent, and less expensive testing. Since spending on BC/DR solutions in organisations has remained stagnant at around 5% of IT operating and capital budgets for the past several years, it's not surprising that enterprises are looking for a solution that can do more with less," says Steve Bailey, regional operations director, CommVault.

Walid Kamal, senior VP, technology security, risk and fraud management at du, believes cloud can make things easier, but reminds people that it is only a tool.

"It frees you of dependence on a particular server and allows you to backup and store data globally. It promises a very high level of availability, aiming to deliver services anytime, anywhere. However, it makes us highly dependent on network uptime, which itself is a risk," he notes.

“THE INSTABILITY IN THE REGION HAS CAUSED A LOT OF COMPANIES TO START HOSTING THEIR SYSTEMS OUTSIDE THEIR BORDERS.”

last year’s earthquake and Europe during their times of social change,” says Richard Cocchiara, IBM distinguished engineer, global practice leader for IT Risk Consulting.

Since the start of the Arab Spring, specialists in the region have seen an increase in the number of DR/BC initiatives from different industry verticals. “The Arab Spring has had a mixed effect on the Middle East market,” explains Nizar ElFarra, pre-sales manager, EMC.

“Many establishments across different verticals have hastened their decision to invest in DR and/or disaster avoidance solutions that range from rudimentary backup and restore techniques to more elaborate active or active/main DR setups.

The instability in the region has caused a lot of companies to start hosting their systems outside their borders or even have a complete disaster recovery solution outside the Middle East,” ElFarra adds.

eHosting DataFort found that the Arab Spring has made Dubai and the UAE as a whole an attractive option for relocating offices, operations and locating secondary DR sites.

“In the current sensitive political scenario in the Arab region as well as the erratic economic conditions around the world, the UAE has emerged as an obvious safe haven, providing comfort through a host of opportunities that boost investor confidence and attract a large influx of people eager to set up business here,” says Sachin Bhardwaj, head of Marketing and Business Development, eHosting DataFort.

“Additionally, its strategic geographical location and strong infrastructural network are key contributors to the increase in foreign direct investment in the ICT sector. The political insecurities in the region served as a good wake-up call to Middle East enterprises on the importance of investing in a DR/BC strategy for the long term.”

More companies have also started to realise the need for a holistic view of BC as opposed to a more simplistic IT infrastructure view, but there is still a real mixture of strategies used – showing there’s clearly still room for improvement.

“[Around Y2K], organisations invested in technology backup. As practice matured, organisations realised that people, facility and business environment play an equally critical role. This led to transformation of DR programs into BC programs,” says Walid Kamal, senior VP, technology security, risk and fraud management, du.

“We see a real broad spectrum of strategies,” adds Adam Wolf, sales director, BIOS Middle East. “There are companies

DISASTER RECOVERY STRATEGIES: KEY STEPS

Act now - Don’t be trying to retrieve a situation after a disaster has happened. Immediately identify the resources that need most protection and build on the plan from there.

Reduce the risk of loss - Ensure anti-virus subscriptions are up to date and data critical to the running of the business, such as customer records, is adequately protected. This reduces the risk of cyber theft and accidental deletion.

Backup - Have key data, such as customer records and financial information, backed up regularly – not only to an internal backup drive, but also to an external location. Bandwidth may make external backup costly, so organisations need to ascertain what is most critical and prioritise. Many organisations could free up more bandwidth than they realise by having stricter internet usage policies.

Educate - Not all employees are power users, but they should know the basics of computer security and what to do if information is deleted or cannot be located.

Test - Updates may not be administered automatically and data backups may not occur when they’re supposed to. Remember to regularly check that these things are happening as they should.

Review - Regularly revisit disaster recovery plans, especially in the light of hardware or software changes.

that equip their directors with sat-phones in case the network goes down, such as in Egypt during the Arab Spring. Other companies draw up contracts with similar businesses to use specialist equipment, rather than making the costly investments twice. More often than not, companies do take business continuity seriously.”

Globally, more DR/BC regulations are appearing. These are still in their early stages and companies are having to find their feet when it comes to compliance. Regulation is undoubtedly important in promoting DR/BC, as many companies will only

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Gomaa: Customers are aware of the need for disaster recovery.



invest when they absolutely need to or are told to, but a level of confusion is added when companies have to deal with varying standards from around the world.

“Multinational organisations based in the Middle East are having to create business continuity programs that will allow them to adapt to the regulations of the country in which they do business. That is why there is such activity around creating standards and procedures,” adds Steve Bailey, regional operations director, CommVault.

“Some global industries like finance have been pushed by US regulations to ensure their business continuity if they operate in the US, regulations which have impacted the business continuity in the global operations of these companies,” adds Paul-François Cattier, global vice president Datacenter, Schneider Electric.

While companies do respond to regulatory requirements, they respond even more to business pressures. Cattier believes that it’s always better to raise an issue, educate, guide and promote voluntary actions than to enforce regulations; however, when this option doesn’t work, “regulations will be efficient in ensuring the needed business continuity”.

Cocchiara believes that in the end BC will become a matter of business survival and growth: “That is what will really drive companies to implement an IT risk management strategy.” ■

SOME OF THE OPTIONS...

Many existing technologies exist can take care of a company’s business continuity and DR needs. Walid Gomaa of HP’s Storage Division highlights some of the main options. Available technologies that can help include local data replicas, clustering of the server and storage, backup to disk and replication of disk to disk systems.”

Some technologies can help you save cash when brought together. “By combining virtualisation and enterprise storage, you can create the flexibility to implement cost effective disaster recovery,” highlights Adam Wolf of BIOS Middle East. “By virtualising applications, they become infinitely more portable, allowing for cloud disaster recovery, remote backup, and consolidation strategies.

“In the virtual world, servers and data are one. Enterprise storage allows you to cut the data into blocks and move it to other locations, even with low bandwidth. Additionally, WAN optimisation helps reduce the provisioning of internet lines. Coupling these technologies can give companies the maximum reduction in total cost of ownership for implementations,” he explains.