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Business continuance after a catastrophe can be addressed through cloud computing solutions

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Hurricane Irene left a trail of damage to east coast homes and businesses that will cost an estimated $2.6 billion to repair. Eight million homes and businesses were left without power after the storm, and about half that many were still in the dark for Labor Day weekend. In Upstate New York, damage to the Port Jervis commuter rail line will take months to repair, causing massive service disruptions for thousands of daily commuters.

Irene is regarded as one of the top ten most costly storms on record; and the level of destruction could have been worse. By the time Irene hit the Northeast, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm.

The extent of damage to businesses and destruction of commuter systems can lead to questions on the sustainability of business operations should a disaster strike. Can we survive a massive loss of data? How long can we go without access to files and applications in the event of a power outage? What if our employees cannot get into the office for an extended period of time?

Today, many concerns related to business continuance after a natural or man-made catastrophe can be addressed through cloud computing solutions. Cloud computing refers to technology applications that can be hosted in a remote data center and delivered to the end user on demand (as-a-Service) over an Internet connection. Solutions can be tailored to meet the voice, data, and video application requirements of a business. Services can be billed based on storage needs and on a monthly per-user basis.

Cloud computing solutions can be configured to provide a mirror-image of a company's data and business applications, with replication processes being performed as frequently as up to the minute. In the event that access to data is interrupted due to loss of power in the office, end users can gain remote access to replicated files and applications on cloud-based servers. This can be accomplished from any point with Internet connectivity. Business owners can plan for business continuity for those who suffer from illness or disruption of commuter services by enabling access to the company cloud from their homes.

A cloud computing data center should reside in a secure network operations center (NOC) that provides protection from data loss due to electrical outages and server failure. With millions of people relying on connectivity to the NOC through disastrous circumstances, sites are equipped with massive generators that are well maintained and frequently tested to ensure proper power and cooling environments to all systems. These sites are monitored around the clock, with additional onsite and remote engineers readied throughout periods of potential impact, when predictable.

Cloud computing vendors should be able to provide "carrier diversity" - meaning that your data is accessible via more than just one circuit carrier. If the primary circuit to the NOC is cut off, an alternative carrier circuit can act as a failover to provide continuous access.

While the timing and severity of catastrophic incidents cannot be predicted with 100 percent certainty, business owners can do their best to prepare for data recovery and business continuity through the cloud. Good planning can lessen the impact of a disaster on the survivability of a business as services and infrastructure are restored.

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