



Data safety in the cloud: Good planning can lessen the impact of a disaster

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Recent natural disasters have highlighted the need for New York area businesses to implement disaster recovery and business continuity plans that ensure the security of their valuable data. In 2011, Hurricane Irene left businesses and homes without power for weeks. Just this past fall, Superstorm Sandy flooded lower Manhattan, and blacked-out the entire island below 39th St. for a full work week. Both storms disrupted commuter services for months, hindering productivity for companies without emergency telecommuter plans.

The extent of damage to businesses and destruction of commuter systems led to questions about data security and the sustainability of business operations should 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 extended periods of time? As companies rebuilt, they were provided with opportunities to consider cloud computing as part of their business strategies to maintain the safety and security of their data in the event of future emergencies.

Cloud computing provides the safety and high availability of a secure, redundantly-powered Network Operations Center (NOC) to store and deliver data and business applications on demand over an internet connection. Solutions can be tailored to meet the voice, data, and video application requirements of a business. Applications such as VMware's virtual desktop interface (VDI) VMware View deliver reliable and secure desktop computing to end users at any location. By logging in through any device, users can enjoy the productivity and personalization of their own desktop anywhere. During VMware View remote sessions, IT policy and data protection is maintained in the cloud. Virtual desktop applications have become popular, cost-effective models for both tele-working and business continuance strategies.

Automated back-up in the cloud has increased in relevance as part of disaster recovery strategies, which can keep data safely stored in the event of a disaster that damages on-premise computer equipment. A good off-site back-up plan eliminates the inefficiencies of legacy practices of distributed tape devices, manual routines, and off-site tape storage. The impact of Sandy emphasized the need for businesses to move away from older policies for data back-up. Some businesses incurred tremendous expenses and lost time as they waited for hired specialists to recover data from servers and tapes that were damaged in the storm. Others lost some of their data forever. Cloud back-up 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 workplace, replicated files on cloud-based servers can be recovered and accessed over a secure Internet connection.

There were many success stories related to business continuance after Sandy for businesses that invested in cloud computing. Several cloud data centers in New York City were able to maintain power via generator and battery backup until utility power was restored later in the week. While the timing and severity of catastrophic incidents and the success of good planning cannot be predicted with 100% certainty, business owners can do their best to prepare for the safety of their valuable data through cloud computing. 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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