

VERTEKS CONNECTION



JUNE/JULY 2011



Insurance Policy

Verteks helps protect Dane Griffin Insurance against downtime and unpredictable IT costs.

Inurance is, of course, about reducing risk. You pay a stable monthly premium so that you won't be hit with a gigantic bill should something go wrong.

For Dane Griffin Insurance, Verteks Consulting acts as insurance against network downtime and unexpected IT costs. Verteks has developed a customized service plan that provides the insurance agency with proactive maintenance and ongoing support — all for a low monthly budget.

“It's much more cost-effective for us to utilize Verteks than to hire a tech person. We have a couple of people in the office who have the ability to deal with some software issues, but we rely on the Verteks team for most of our technical needs. They're very knowledgeable and responsive,” said Dane Griffin, president, Griffin Insurance.

“Verteks builds a little extra time into our service plan to handle anything that's unexpected so that our budget remains predictable. If we build up extra time we can use it for special

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projects, such as a hardware or software upgrade. It's an ideal solution for a small business like ours."

Special Coverage

While Verteks Consulting provides coverage for all kinds of IT needs, the Verteks team has also developed specialized skills for the insurance industry. Most insurance agencies use one of two software packages designed for their specific business

needs. Verteks is familiar with both applications.

"We actually have two different agencies that operate independently of each other, and they each use different software packages," Griffin said. "I purchased our Ocala location, which is doing business as Griffin Insurance Agency, in 2002. Here we use software from Applied Systems. Then I bought a second agency in Dunnel-

lon, 25 miles southwest of Ocala, which is doing business as Sheffield Insurance. They already had a good software vendor in place, one that's recognized in the insurance industry, so I chose to maintain that software there.

"Verteks already had experience in upgrading and solving problems with AMS, the software we use at Sheffield, as well as experience working with the Applied Systems software we have in Ocala. In fact, one of the reasons we started using Verteks was their experience with Applied Systems. It's unusual for a technology provider to have this sort of specialized experience, and we find it very helpful. We like the idea that if we have a problem there's a good chance Verteks has already dealt with it with another insurance agency."

Ensuring Efficiency

Dane Griffin Insurance and Sheffield Insurance employ a total of eight people across both locations. Like most small business owners, Griffin

is as concerned with efficiency as with cost. Verteks Consulting provides a highly responsive local presence as well as the ability to take care of many problems remotely.

"Verteks will certainly come to our offices as needed, but they can also monitor our systems and solve most problems without coming to our office," Griffin said. "It's faster and certainly more cost-effective, too."

Verteks also serves as a trusted partner, helping Griffin navigate the complexities of today's technology environment. Verteks engineers provide advice and recommend solutions that help keep the two agencies running smoothly.

"For example, they have been very helpful in dealing with e-mail security and spam filtering — they were very proactive in coming up with a solution to prevent spam from becoming a big problem for us. They also suggest periodic hardware and software upgrades and are always good about explaining why things are needed and what the impact will be on the business. I know nothing about technology, so it's critical to have someone I can trust."

Technology is essential to business, but it comes with its share of risks. Without proactive maintenance and rapid support, organizations can experience downtime and unpredictable costs. Verteks Consulting provides insurance against these risks and helps businesses maximize the value of their IT investments.

SOLUTION SUMMARY

- ◆ Customized service plan covers both routine and unexpected IT needs with a predictable monthly budget.
- ◆ Remote monitoring, proactive maintenance and responsive support reduce the risk of downtime.
- ◆ Expertise with specialized software for the insurance industry ensures rapid problem resolution and cost-effective service.
- ◆ Knowledgeable recommendations and implementation services help small businesses keep abreast of technology changes.

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Editorial Correspondence:

4941 S. 78th E. Ave.,

Tulsa, OK 74145

800.726.7667 • Fax 918.270.7134

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Mobile Computing Top IT Challenge

The control and use of smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices in the workplace has become the No. 1 challenge for business technology professionals, according to a recent survey of CPAs and financial executives conducted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA).

The finding was based on responses from nearly 1,400 CPAs nationwide specializing in information technology. In addition to mobile devices, the survey signaled future IT issues will revolve around implementation of touch-screen technology, deployment of faster networks and voice recognition technology.

"The surging use of smartphones and tablets means people are doing business, exchanging sensitive data wherever, whenever they want to," said Ron Box, CPA/CITP, CFF. "The technology is advancing so rapidly that the capabilities for controlling and protecting the information on mobile devices is lagging behind. What was once as simple as losing your phone could now create an enormous security risk for organizations."

"Driving business value while managing risk means using technology solutions like encryption and asserting policy controls over what you can and can't do remotely," said Joel Lanz, CPA/CITP, CFF. "This is forcing IT professionals to think anew about how to manage networks and will now require a whole new level of communication with users."

Lanz and Box are cochairmen of the AICPA's Top Technology Initiatives task force which produces the annual survey to help CPAs who are trusted advisors to corporate executives and board audit committees. The survey captures and ranks the business-related technology challenges that CPAs across the country are helping clients and executives address as they assess the role of technology in their organizations.

CIOs Expect Increased Tablet Use

With the business world being reshaped by mobile technologies, companies are moving to embrace the highly portable, Internet-linked tablet computer. Nearly half of CIOs in a recent survey said their companies will increase the use of tablets in the next two years.

The survey by Robert Half Technology was conducted by an independent research firm and is based on telephone interviews with more than 1,400 CIOs from companies across the U.S. with 100 or more employees.

CIOs were asked if they believed their companies' use of tablet computers would increase or decrease in the next two years. Forty-nine percent said it would increase, 2 percent said it would decrease, 40 percent said it would remain the same and 9 percent either did not know or did not answer.

"With more companies moving to Internet-based file sharing and data storage, along with an emphasis on portability and mobile productivity, it's no surprise CIOs anticipate wider use of tablet computers," said John Reed, executive director of Robert Half Technology. "The challenge for IT departments will be providing adequate support and security."

Reed adds that as tablet computers further decentralize the workplace and make it more mobile, companies will seek IT professionals who can assist with mobile application development and security issues, along with troubleshooting for end-users.



Think this is the only disaster recovery plan you can afford?

Think again

Small business owners know the importance of their business data. Downtime — which costs small businesses an average of more than \$12,000 a day — can threaten your survival.

Don't let a disaster put you out of business.

Verteks delivers powerful and cost-effective Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Planning that combines planning, prevention and protection to make sure your business thrives no matter what comes your way.

Let us help you protect your company against the disasters that can literally put you out of business. [Contact Verteks for an in-depth analysis of your disaster preparedness.](#)



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The Collaboration Conundrum



Employees say collaboration makes them more efficient, but they are constrained by outdated corporate policies and the tools they need to collaborate effectively.

Collaboration has become second nature to American consumers. A wide variety of devices, applications and services make it easy for us to keep in touch by voice, video and social networking. Those same technologies can greatly benefit businesses, but many employees complain that they are not being allowed to take advantage of them.

It's not that organizations don't understand the benefits of collaboration — they do. A recent global study conducted by InsightExpress found that 77 percent of IT decision makers surveyed planned to increase their spending on collaboration tools in 2010, identifying videoconferencing, Web conferencing and IP telephony as primary areas of investment. More than half (56 percent) expect their spending on collaboration tools to increase by 10 percent or more. Productivity and efficiency were identified as the primary benefits of increased collaboration.

A substantial majority of end-users (69 percent) regularly use advanced collaboration tools. When asked to identify how collaboration benefits them, 45 percent pointed to improved productivity and efficiency, 40 percent noted that they receive assistance in solving work-related problems, and 31 percent enjoyed accelerated decision making.

Many employees feel that their ability to collaborate is constrained by corporate policies, however. End-users also feel that elements of the corporate culture can inhibit their ability to collaborate successfully: 46 percent feel that all

decisions are made by people at the top of their organization, and 39 percent say colleagues are not willing to share information when it does not benefit their own business unit.

E-mail Still Reigns

A recent study conducted by Harris Research found that the most frequently used application for collaborating with others is e-mail (91 percent), but what people want from their e-mail is changing. Respondents like the fact that e-mail provides an easily accessible record of communication and the ability to communicate with many people at once. Users also rank e-mail prominently among various collaboration tools because there is a high level of comfort in using the application to easily communicate with others inside and outside their organizations. However, the poll showed there are many pain points associated with the way most e-mail solutions function today.

While e-mail remains the preferred method of collaboration, many respondents complained they receive too much irrelevant e-mail (40 percent) and that they lack the ability to collaborate in real time (32 percent). End-users also dislike the fact that they have very limited storage (25 percent) and that large volumes of e-mail come into their inbox with no organizational structure (21 percent).

In addition to e-mail, the Harris poll found that other applications being used by respondents to collaborate with others in the workplace include shared spaces (66 percent), voice calls and teleconferencing (66 percent), Web conferencing

ing (55 percent), videoconferencing (35 percent), instant messaging (34 percent) and social networking (17 percent).

Get the Conversation Started

The InsightExpress study found that slightly more than half (52 percent) of organizations prohibit the use of social media applications or similar collaboration tools at work. However, in some cases workers are taking matters into their own hands: Half admit to accessing prohibited applications once a week, and more than a quarter (27 percent) admit to changing the settings on their devices to gain access. Of the respondents using social networking for work, 59 percent say that their usage has increased over the past year.

The Harris study also found that half of those using social networking for work bypass IT restrictions to do so. The study participants who prefer to use social networks indicated they would like to have control over who sees their content as well as the ability to share with groups of users using different tools. The respondents also indicated the

desire to collaborate in real time without having to open up an additional application.

Employees identified a variety of other frustrations with collaboration devices and applications. These include restrictions set by IT managers on the types of collaboration technologies that can be used at the workplace, a lack of integration among the applications, non-compatible formats, and the limited number of collaboration tools at their disposal. Ease of use (58 percent), the ability to communicate anywhere and at any time (45 percent), and features and functionality (37 percent) are the three most desired attributes of a device or application.

These studies highlight how end-users can benefit from increased collaboration, but also identify a need for some organizations to adapt their corporate processes and culture to take successful collaborative working to the next level. As collaboration becomes ubiquitous in the consumer realm, organizations should recognize that employees will do what it takes to gain access to these technologies in order to get the job done.

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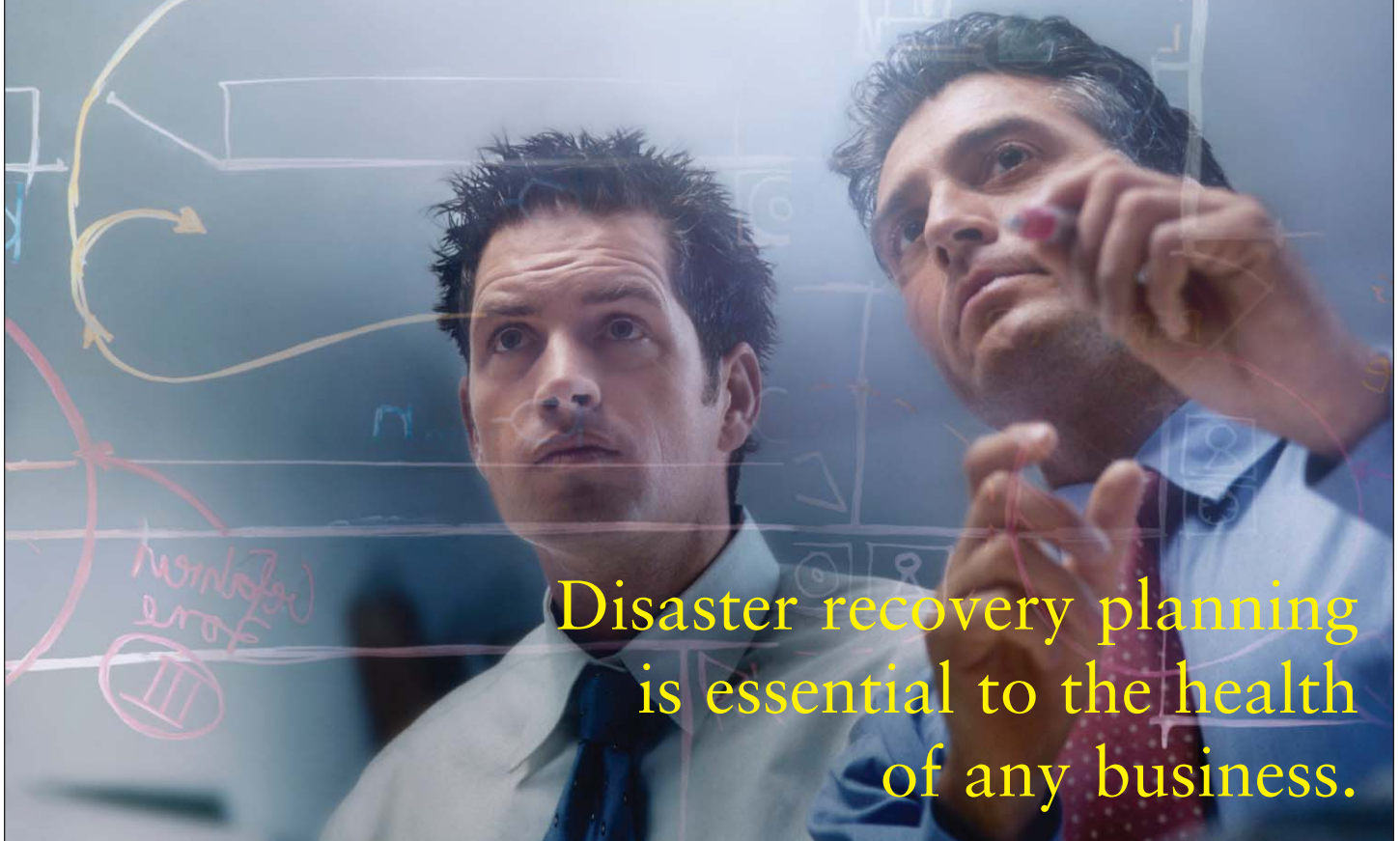


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Can Your Business Survive?



Disaster recovery planning is essential to the health of any business.

Natural disasters, theft, cyberattacks, equipment failure and human error can strike at any time and without warning. When critical operational information is lost, organizations can expend valuable time and resources in an attempt to recover that information. In today's business environment, however, few businesses can survive days or weeks of downtime as they attempt to recover systems and data. That's one reason why 25 percent of businesses fail to reopen following a disaster, according to the Institute for Business and Home Safety.

Yet many small to midsize business (SMBs) do not understand the importance of disaster preparedness, according to Symantec's 2011 SMB Disaster Preparedness Survey. The survey, conducted in October and November 2010 by Applied Research, included more than 1,840 IT professionals responsible for computers, networks and technology resources at SMBs in 23 countries.

Half of the respondents said their organizations do not have a disaster plan in place. Forty-one percent said that it

never occurred to them to put together a plan, and 40 percent stated that disaster preparedness is not a priority for them. The information that drives most SMBs is simply not protected.

"According to the research findings, SMBs still haven't recognized the tremendous impact a disaster can have on their businesses. Despite warnings, it seems like many still think it can't happen to them," said Bernard Laroche, senior director, SMB product marketing, Symantec. "Disasters happen and SMBs cannot afford to risk losing their information or — more importantly — their customers' critical information. Simple planning can enable SMBs to protect their information in the event of a disaster, which in turn will help them build trust with their customers."

Ignoring Warnings — Until Too Late

This lack of preparation is surprising given how many SMBs are at risk. Sixty-five percent of survey respondents live in regions susceptible to natural disasters. In the past 12 months, the typical SMB experienced six computer outages,

with the leading causes being cyberattacks, power outages and natural disasters. The median cost of downtime for an SMB is \$12,500 per day.

Outages cause customers to leave — 54 percent of SMB customer respondents reported they have switched SMB vendors due to unreliable computing systems, a 12 percent increase over last year's survey. Forty-four percent of SMB customers surveyed stated that their SMB vendors have temporarily shut down due to a disaster. This affects their own businesses — when SMBs experience downtime, it costs their customers an average of \$10,000 per day. In addition to direct financial costs, 29 percent of the customers surveyed lost “some” or “a lot” of important data as a result of disasters impacting their SMB vendors.

Government regulations such as HIPAA and Sarbanes-Oxley are also now mandating offsite backups and disaster recovery plans. Organizations that do not properly comply could face stiff penalties.

Despite all of these risk factors, SMBs are not being proactive when it comes to disaster recovery planning. Half of the SMBs that have implemented disaster preparedness plans did so after experiencing an outage and/or data loss. Fifty-two percent put together their plans within the last six months. However, only 28 percent have actually tested their recovery plans, which is a critical component of actually being prepared for a potential disaster.

Getting Started Today

Even the most basic protections are lacking in many SMBs. Less than half of SMBs back up their data at least weekly and only 23 percent back up daily. Respondents also reported that a disaster would cause information loss. In fact, 44 percent of SMBs said they would lose at least 40 percent of their data in the event of a disaster.

These organizations are taking an unneeded risk. Thanks to disk-based solutions, backup and recovery processes are simpler and faster than ever before. Some of the latest backup devices can also function as virtual servers should an organization's primary server fail. Furthermore, virtualization and cloud-based solutions make it cost-effective to replicate backup data offsite without a large capital outlay for redundant equipment.

However, SMBs should not confuse data backup with disaster recovery planning. An effective disaster recovery plan should address not only backup and recovery procedures but offsite data storage and electronic and physical network access. It involves critical decisions that balance the cost of disaster recovery with the risk to the business.

A critical initial step is to list business functions, ranked in priority according to which must be back in operation first. Once these priorities are established, recovery time objectives (the allowable amount of downtime before the function is brought back online) and recovery point objec-

Tips for Developing a Disaster Recovery Plan

Thirty-six percent of SMBs intend to create a disaster preparedness plan in the future, according to the Symantec SMB Disaster Preparedness Survey. Symantec offers the following recommendations for organizations ready to get started:

- **Don't wait until it's too late:** It is critical that SMBs not wait until after a disaster to think about what they should have done to protect their information. Not only is downtime costly from a financial perspective, but it could mean the complete demise of the business. SMBs can't wait until it is too late, and need to begin mapping out a disaster preparedness plan today. A plan should include identification of key systems and data that is intrinsic to the running of the business. Basically, identify your critical resources.

- **Protect information completely:** To reduce the risk of losing critical business information, SMBs must implement the appropriate security and backup solutions to archive important files, such as customer records and financial information. Natural disasters, power outages and cyberattacks can all result in data and financial loss, so SMBs need to make sure important files are saved not only on an external hard drive and/or company network but in a safe, off-site location.

- **Get employees involved:** SMB employees play a key role in helping to prevent downtime, and should be educated on computer security best practices and what to do if information is accidentally deleted or cannot easily be found in their files. Since SMBs have limited resources, all employees should know how to retrieve the business's information in times of disaster.

- **Test frequently:** After a disaster hits is the worst time to learn that critical files were not backed up as planned. Regular disaster recovery testing is invaluable. Test your plan anytime anything changes in your environment.

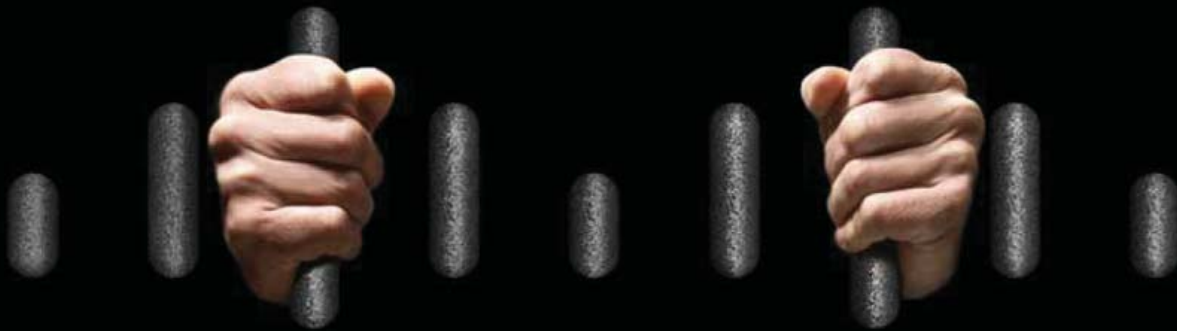
- **Review your plan:** If frequent testing is not feasible due to resources and bandwidth, SMBs should at least review their disaster preparedness plan on a quarterly basis.

tives (the allowable amount of data loss since the last backup) should be established for each function. Not everything needs protection — the key is to focus on core applications and data.

This winter's “Snowmageddon” remains fresh in our minds. Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami still dominate the headlines. Hurricane season is just around the corner. It's time for SMBs to recognize that the next disaster could strike at any time, and only those with an effective disaster recovery plan will survive.

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