



IBM's Business Continuity Bundle for SMEs

Spotlight

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When discussing business continuity with small- to medium-enterprise (SME) IT professionals, it is common to encounter the following scenario: The IT professional knows that the company is at risk if there is a prolonged disruption to normal IT operations. However, when it comes to securing the financial and staff resources required to put an adequate business continuity capability in place, it seems undoable. If it's proposed, the company's CFO balks, saying that such a plan is essentially an insurance policy and the company buys insurance policies only when it can afford them. "And right now, we can't afford one."

It's a flawed argument because an insurance policy is a shared risk agreement, whereas there is no capability to share risk when it comes to keeping the company's data flowing. Under an insurance policy, an insurer pays after a loss is reported. If your customers lose access to your online ordering system for a prolonged period, no one will pay your company back for the resulting loss of revenue.

It's a well-reported fact that companies can and do suffer severely when the normal functioning of their IT infrastructure is disrupted. Loss of revenue is common. And although less common, severe IT outages can result in business failures. And we're not just talking about financial risk. Disruption to healthcare systems, for example, can put patients at risk.

Data is now the life blood of all business, including small and medium-sized businesses. Therefore, we believe that protecting ongoing availability to the company's IT-based business processes by its employees and customers is in fact a fiduciary imperative.

There are many ways to approach business continuity from an IT perspective, including:

- Data protection systems (data backup to disk and/or tape) including continuous data protection
- Implementation of redundant systems, both on-site and off-site
- Off-site data vaulting
- Outsourcing of all or specific processes related to IT functioning



Here we look at a new IBM approach to business continuance for SMEs: a one-price-takes-all bundled solution that features hardware, software, and optional services.

IBM Comprehensive Data Protection Express

A recent trend among IT vendors is pre-integration of a diverse set of components and services, introduced to the market as solution offerings. This is particularly true of vendors targeting the small to medium enterprise (SME) business segment, where there is a perceived need for simplicity in both acquiring and implementing IT to solve specific, important, readily-identifiable problems.

As noted, IT availability is a critical component of business survivability. However, we estimate that at least 60 percent of small- to medium-enterprises currently lack a functioning business continuance plan. This is likely due to three reasons:

- IT administrators don't have the time to implement an adequate business continuity capability.
- IT administrators lack sufficient understanding in this area to build the required capabilities.
- Senior management believes it can't afford to address this exposure, or doesn't fully understand the severity of the exposure.

These are all very real and appropriate concerns. That doesn't mean they can't be resolved, however. IBM, for example, addresses these inhibitors with a Comprehensive Data Protection Express bundle for Microsoft Windows applications and data. It combines pre-integrated hardware and software components with optional services, and is significantly discounted vs. the list price of purchasing the components separately.

The hardware/software bundle includes:

Tivoli Storage Manager (TSM) FastBack – The centerpiece of this bundle, FastBack combines continuous data protection (CDP), replication, and snapshot technologies, all typically used in enterprise data protection and recovery scenarios. Backup copies of files are created and stored on the DS series disk array that is part of this bundle and updated on a continuous basis while files are open.

File restoration is a GUI-based drag-and-drop process, while access to full volumes can be restored within minutes. The ability to "roll back" to a file or volume copy that represents the state of the data at a particular point in time is also supported.

DS3000 disk arrays – The DS series of IBM disk arrays is externally attached RAID storage that supports direct connection to a host server via storage area network (SAN). The DS3200 is priced into the bundle with three different DS 3000 model options (3200, 3300, 3400). Depending on the model, these arrays can be either SAS or FC attached, be configured with FC and/or SATA disk, and can scale to 100+ TB of disk storage using expansion units.

System x server – IBM's System x server running the Microsoft Windows Server 2003 operating system is included as a dedicated FastBack server to which the DS series disk is directly attached.

Optional services include:

Implementation Services for Disk Systems –

Installation and setup services specifically for the Comprehensive Data Protection bundle provided either by IBM or an IBM certified business partner

ServicePac for Remote Technical Support Services –

Unlimited phone support for System x servers and attached storage devices

IBM Global Finance (IGF) financing options – IGF presently offers the most comprehensive portfolio of financing options in the industry. Customers can finance the entire bundle including hardware, software and services as either a conditional sale or FASB-qualified operating lease. Future upgrade and flexible payment options can be included.

Business Continuance in Practice for SMEs

SME business owners are generally familiar with the more obvious reasons for disruption to normal IT functioning, including system failure, power outages, and external disasters (flood, fire, etc.). But, with increased use of the Internet by employees, a new set of events is now climbing up the list of threats to business continuity in terms of commonality and severity. These include viruses,

spyware, and malicious attacks using the Internet as an attack vector. It is also the case that the most common cause of system disruption and data loss is simple human error.

Because the reliance on IT systems to support ongoing business is growing among SMEs and the exposure of those systems to disruption, failure, and attack is also growing, just having a business continuance capability in place simply isn't enough protection. A discipline around business continuity should also be established that includes:

Careful planning, including establishing recovery time and point objectives (RTO and RPO) – Some applications are more important than others. Some, like MS Exchange or applications based on MS SQL Server, are typically high on the priority list. The high priority applications should be recovered first in case of a disruption. Others also need to be recovered, but can wait until later. Making these decisions is a process known as establishing a recovery time objective (RTO—the amount of time post-disruption required to have an application fully functioning) and recovery point objective (RPO—the point in time pre-disruption from which the application can be restarted) for each application. Establishing an RPO will also require decisions about how much data loss is acceptable for a given application. While IBM's CDPS Express bundle supports minute-to-minute data recovery, this advanced capability may not be required for all applications. Much has been written on this subject and we strongly recommend that SMEs further research this topic.

Making sure that the business continuity plan actually functions – It is not enough to run data protection processes faithfully. One must test them to see if they actually work. There are a number of ways to do this, such as running periodic data restorations to verify that:

- The data copies needed to restore an application have not been corrupted or deleted
- The recovery time experienced actually meets your RTOs

IBM's CDP bundle creates data copies on disk rather than tape, eliminating missing or dysfunctional tape problems that can cripple one's

ability to restore an application from tape. However, even disk copies can be corrupted and vulnerable to virus infections.

We also want to point out that a number of vendors now offer management software tools that monitor data protection and business continuance processes and report on potential vulnerabilities.

Maintaining an off-site copy of data – Having a redundant copy of data and even redundant systems on-site in support of a business continuance plan are basic requirements. These will protect in case of system failure, for example. But if a fire wipes out the local IT facility, the resulting data loss could smoke the business as well. There are many ways to address this requirement, from sending physical storage media such as disks or backup tapes to a secure off-site storage facility, to replicating data to another off-site IT facility. The solution bundle highlighted here also supports off-site data copy functions, and can be "doubled-up" between two geographically removed sites such that each is a remote copy target for the other. Again, much has been written on this topic.

Conclusion

The best practice of all is establishing IT continuity as a critical foundation for business continuity. Data loss and system failures do happen to SMEs. The results can range from loss of business opportunity to outright business failure. As stated, we believe that exercising due diligence in protecting and securing IT systems is a fiduciary imperative.

Here, IBM has stepped forward to produce an integrated set of hardware, software, and services to ease the establishment of a business continuance function where one does not exist. Value here is defined not only by the products themselves but the fact that IBM's pre-integration of components takes time, guesswork, risk, and cost out of the implementation phase of a business continuance project. IBM's bundle discounts and financing options will make this offering easier on the budget as well. But IBM can't do everything. Customers also bear the responsibility of understanding business continuance objectives and processes in order to make this solution work.