

When a crisis hits, how safe is your IT? – Jan 2008

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Increasingly, small and mid-sized businesses (SMB) are becoming more reliant on their IT infrastructure. This is not just because it is used to drive important internal applications, but because the majority of SMBs now use IT to automate interaction with external organisations. This means that an IT failure does not just affect SMBs, but also the businesses with which they interact on a regular basis.

IT failure is no longer an internal inconvenience, but can have a significant impact on the ability to trade, can damage reputations and lead to loss of competitive advantage. Why then do so many SMBs put their business at risk by leaving themselves vulnerable to IT failure?

The two most important assets for many firms are employees and information, the latter being mostly managed using IT these days. About 40 per cent of SMBs have just one location and about 90 per cent of these use that one location to house both their employees and IT department.

Consequently, if that building becomes unavailable because of a fire or flood, for example, the SMB has nowhere to house either of its key assets. However, if the two are separated and linked electronically, the problem would be halved.

But while there is abundant network capacity and third-party data centre facilities to support safe separation of users and core IT facilities, the majority of SMBs do not make use of them. Co-location providers that lease third-party data centre facilities offer service level agreements that promise to considerably lessen the likelihood of losing access for core IT infrastructure.

And even in the event of employees being unable to get to their normal place of work, if the IT was still up and running many could access it remotely and get on with their jobs from home.

Some 20 per cent of SMB employees are now issued with laptops for accessing the company's IT and a smaller but growing number are using handheld devices.

The fact that SMBs increasingly understand the benefits of and allow such remote working means that many are able to carry on working even when their normal place of work is closed. But it also means that in a time of crisis SMBs have the means to provide support to other users who do not normally work remotely, for example, by allowing them to access IT from home over secure sockets layer virtual private networks using home computers.

For most SMBs, managing end user devices, security and network access is a daily headache. Having good management tools in place and automating tasks where ever possible is essential for keeping overheads to a minimum. And this is where confidence levels need to be improved. Quocirca research shows the SMBs that are most nervous about mobile device security are the ones most reticent to allow their use.

However, this means that not only are they missing out on the flexibility and business efficiency offered by remote access, but they are also not putting in place the foundations for business continuity in the face of disaster.

Nearly all SMBs can do more to ensure better information security and improve their ability to survive a crisis, but some have a lot further to travel than others.

Quocirca's report, Information Security for SMBs, is free to readers at:

www.quocirca.com/pages/analysis/reports/view/store250/item19812/?link_683=19812

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at <http://www.quocirca.com>