

## Computer Weekly – Time for Plan B? April 2009

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Most users must have had one of those bad PC days, when you arrive at work enthused to complete a task, only to end up spending the day waiting for IT to fix your newly broken PC, or in a small business often doing it yourself. When this happens at the server level, many users are impacted, and it can be expected to happen at the most inconvenient time, such as the end of a month, quarter or year.

Most managers are aware of the reliance their business has on IT and the impact of applications not being available, but although they may not like to admit it, many only have crossed fingers as a business continuity plan. Basically they are hoping that the inevitable does not happen any time soon, and this is especially likely to be true for small and medium sized businesses (SMBs). There are a number of ways of mitigating the risk of such server failure.

One is to have a second server on hot or cold stand-by. This is expensive, at least doubling the cost of the initial investment in hardware and software, and unless the standby server is at a separate location, it does not protect against fire and flood.

A second is to engage a managed service provider (MSP) to host and manage servers; they then take on the task of providing a given level of availability. For those with existing in-house systems, using an MSP might be a future consideration, but may not be practical for providing a business continuity plan in the short term. And, anyway, MSPs are not immune from hardware failure, although they are more likely to spot emerging problems before they happen and to have the spare parts at hand to get systems up and running again quickly.

A third way is to use a service offered by a new company called Plan B Disaster Recovery (Plan B DR). It can put server level disaster recovery in place almost overnight. Plan B DR does just what it says on the box: for a fee of around £180 per month per server it will keep images of your servers off-site at its data centre ready to fire up if a disaster should happen.

The process is straightforward. Once you have signed up Plan B DR sends you an appliance which you plug into your network. A one time password allows you to browse to the appliance and identify target servers to which the appliance downloads an agent. Outwardly the appliance can only communicate with Plan B DR, which uses it to create daily images of your servers and storage volumes associated with them.

Obviously this means you may lose up to 24 hours worth of data depending on when your server fails, but that is no different to the situation with normal daily backups, and basic server configurations do not change that often, but can be frustratingly hard to rebuild if no record has been kept of how that server was built, which was, maybe, a number of years back.

Plan B DR allows, and recommends, that its service is tested on a regular basis, so when it comes to the crunch and the service needs to be invoked in anger there are no hiccups. When this does happen users are simply redirected via a VPN link to a virtual server image running on Plan B DR's infrastructure. The provision of the virtual server is covered by the subscription for a few weeks until the old server is fixed or a new one found, at which point the server image can be reloaded in its current state by Plan B DR. The replacement could even be at the premises of an MSP if such a disaster provokes a rethink about how IT is managed in the first place.

Plan B DR has been up and running for four months. So far it only supports Microsoft servers, although it has plans for Linux. But as its target market is SMBs, where many servers are Microsoft based, it has had plenty of interest and it has already signed up 20 customers. So far only one has required the service to be invoked for real (although a test invocation of every server image is carried out on a daily basis). Plan B DR sells the service direct or via resellers and it is considering working with overseas partners that could set up their own

service with an agreement to use Plan B DR's appliance.

Does Plan B DR have a Plan B? Of course; its main infrastructure is hosted by an MSP at a data centre in Maidenhead UK. Its backup systems are in its own offices in Theale near Reading. If, at the back of your mind you know that your business is vulnerable to a bad server day, maybe it is time to think about a Plan B and time to call Plan B DR.

## 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, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, 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

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