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ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT HURRICANE SANDY?

4 Key Considerations In Managed Hosting

In late October 2012, Hurricane Sandy made landfall in the Caribbean, mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States with devastating impact, causing an estimated $65.6 billion in losses due to damage and business interruption. Here at SunGard, hundreds of customers were in the direct path of the hurricane across many of our datacenters in the Northeast.

By the time Hurricane Sandy made landfall, we received 342 alerts and 117 disaster declarations for our disaster recovery customers. Just as important, hundreds of our managed hosting customers who trust us to keep their production applications and IT environments always available had no interruption of service – with 100% uptime. Additionally, our Carlstadt data center also served as an impromptu community command center for local law enforcement, medical and first response teams.

The following are key lessons learned from Hurricane Sandy, best practices and and important considerations when evaluating a managed hosting provider. Is your managed hosting partner ready for the next superstorm? Are you?

TOP CONSIDERATIONS FOR MANAGED HOSTING SERVICES

- Disaster Recovery (DR) Plan - Does your Managed Hosting provider have a DR plan? Not yours, theirs.

- Resource Planning - What is their internal resource and staffing plan for an event like Hurricane Sandy?

- Network & Power Architecture - Is their network architecture resilient? How is power allocated to the facility, and what is the level of diversity?

- On-Demand Hosting Capacity - Does your provider have the ability to scale-up additional capacity via Cloud-based hosting services if needed?

THE PROVIDER'S DR PLAN

When you consider a service provider to host your production applications, the conversations are typically focused on service-level-agreements (SLAs) related to server, network, and power – and in some instances, overall application availability. Most often availability will range on a component basis from four "9s" (99.99%) to five 9s (99.999%) or even 100% (check the fine print in this case). But when viewed through a different lens, in this case, a major disruption like Hurricane Sandy, there's not much consolation in a service credit or small monetary refund when your core applications are down. At this point, negative impact to employee productivity and customer loyalty far exceed a credit on your next invoice. So what can you do about it?

Be sure to ask the provider what their disaster recovery plan is - specifically for the managed hosting data center where you are considering hosting your production applications. How do they handle communications with you during an event? What is their staffing and service delivery model? Do they have the needed diversity levels for network and power? What is the plan if a component or multiple elements of the architecture fail? These are just some of the key questions you need to ask. Also, don't forget to ask what additional resiliency options they offer, like secondary datacenters for replication and full recovery services if needed.

A managed hosting provider implementing best practices should be able to definitively articulate their disaster recovery plan and provide you with a high level of assurance.

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RESOURCE PLANNING

By definition, the managed hosting delivery model is when a service provider hosts and manages several, if not all elements of your company's production application environment within their data center. As we know in the case of Hurricane Sandy, with the pervasive flooding, high winds and overall dangerous conditions, there were "states of emergency" declared across multiple states. Travel was either significantly hindered or in many cases, totally restricted. So who will be in or have access to the data center where your core applications are located, to deliver the services you have contracted for and depend on?

It takes people to deliver service – so make sure that you are asking the right questions when it comes to how the provider will allocate resources during a disruptive event like Sandy. How do they handle communications to their employees who are delivering the service to you? How do they staff their data center when roads are closed and mass-transit is shut down? What is their timeline for event preparation?

Best practices for a managed hosting provider should include advanced communications to their employees to ensure readiness by having the appropriate amounts of primary and secondary resources on-site well in advance of a storm as it worsens.

NETWORK AND POWER ARCHITECTURE

It is critical that resiliency is built into the design of any IT ecosystem and as Hurricane Sandy made landfall off the coast of the mid-Atlantic, unprecedented winds and flooding became the root-cause of disruption. The domino-effect up the eastern seaboard of these elements was widespread power and network outages for many businesses.

Two of the most vital components to any IT and application architecture are the network and power. While it has become standard for managed hosting providers to have multiple networks into their facilities and backup generators for power, there is much more you should be asking. Dig into the true resiliency of their network and power architecture. What do they really mean when they state they have network diversity? Is there a separate network for replication to get your data off-site if needed? Do they have one main power source and backup generators or do they have two primary power feeds as well as backup generators? If it is the latter, where do their power feeds come from? Are they on the same power grid? How do they handle access to fuel for their backup generators if they need to run the data center off of them for a prolonged period of time?

The managed hosting provider should review core network design and establish failover routes to avoid network congestion around storm affected areas in advance of the actual event. They should also plan out their fuel resources for potential impacted areas, have multiple vendors in place for fuel, and have the ability to run off of generator power as long as needed in the event that a utility power outage persists.

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ON-DEMAND HOSTING CAPACITY

While most companies plan for the unexpected, it is not uncommon for additional needs to arise. Disaster best practices dictate that every possible angle be considered, and at times a "risk vs. cost" trade-off is made. At times like this, flexibility is your best friend. For example, during Hurricane Sandy, as more and more businesses became disrupted and travel conditions worsened, employees were asked to stay at home. But business never sleeps. With a larger number of employees needing to access corporate resources remotely, in many instances corporate IT struggled to quickly provision more capacity to allow these employees to access their applications.

The ability to adapt and scale is critical. Be sure to ask the service provider if they have the ability to provision additional capacity as needed. Can they do it? How quickly can they do it? What is the time you have to commit to the additional capacity?

Make sure the managed hosting provider can deliver the flexibility required in the event of an unexpected event. Ideally they should have cloud-based hosting services as an option in their portfolio which can provide on-demand access to additional capacity.

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CONCLUSION

Running production applications and ensuring their availability is a significant challenge at any time. But when a superstorm like Hurricane Sandy hits, that challenge becomes even more intense. There are many lessons to be learned for both businesses and managed hosting providers alike. It all starts with preparedness and resiliency, and is multi-dimensional across processes, people and technology. Here at SunGard Availability Services, we continually plan, prepare and test our readiness. The lessons we've learned from Hurricane Sandy will help to continually improve our crisis management processes and further benefit our customers.

If your company hosts its production applications within its own datacenter, you should consider IT disaster recovery best practices and lessons learned from Hurricane Sandy to learn more about the three critical recovery layers and what's important for each. To discuss any of the considerations above or to learn more about how we're partnering with companies just like yours to ensure the availability of mission-critical applications, please contact us at (888) 817-0925, or visit us at www.sungardas.com

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