

# AVOIDING INTENSIVE CARE FOR YOUR CHARITY

How can you be sure that your charity could survive a crisis

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The term 'Business Continuity Planning' or BCP, is one that few Finance Directors reach for when starting a conversation around the dining-room table. For many, it is a term that is rarely aired around the boardroom table. It represents a reminder of the fragility of charity's operations, of how its staff, business processes and technology can cause its day to day activities can come to a shuddering halt without so much as a warning. Surely not a subject for mealtimes? However, BCP can be likened to that other activity at the dining-table – eating good food. Ensuring that your body is strong enough to cope with the latest virus or the next late night forms part of why we try to eat wholesome, nutritious food – the body's immune system will do the rest. However, focusing on the details of what we eat and the relative nutritional values of different foods can be a laborious and painstaking task. Reaching for the nearest packet in the 'fridge can be much easier. But supporting our immune system is a vital part of how we remain healthy and are able to withstand events in a way that our families and colleagues can take our good health for granted. BCP is your charity's immune system.

Those of us who preach the value of actively managing an organisation's immune system find that – like any effort that may not have an obvious payoff in the indeterminate future – there is resistance to prioritising this effort over shorter-term priorities. A short-term approach can sometimes lead to organisa-

tions being caught out without adequate preparation for events that can easily be predicted and planned for. The Charity Commission recognise this in its guidance for risk management under SORP requirements.

For IT, a DR Plan means identifying those business systems and grading them according to their criticality to the business. This means assessing the amount of time the organisation can tolerate them being unavailable. Minutes, hours, or days?

It is also necessary to understanding the place of Tape Back-up and the Time to Recovery - TTR, within this strategy.

Many charities find their business critical servers to be, Fundraising Server, Finance Server, Mail Server, SQL Server, AD Server, File and Print,

One charity, Action for Blind People reviewed their BPC and identified their business critical servers. Cost and operational efficiency results indicated a hosted solution.

## Action for blind people

For Action for Blind People, availability of their main business applications is critical to enable a high quality of service to their blind and partially sighted clients.

'Action is reliant on IT systems across the organisation,' says Jacquie Wakeford, 'Any outage impacts productivity and often means that people simply can't work at all.'

After a server hardware failure which meant that the Finance team had no system for several days, Wakeford made business continuity a very high priority. 'We looked at an in-house solution but had to reject it because of high investment cost and the difficulty in maintaining yet another IT environment on another site. And the standard syndicated disaster recovery services are very expensive,' says Wakeford. 'I did a full risk assessment, agreed requirements with the business managers and then looked around for options that would meet our needs and, importantly, that I felt I could get funding agreed for.'

The solution that met both criteria was provided by a company specialising in business continuity and hosted DR solutions, Newton IT. 'We now have a hosted service from Newton IT for our six most critical systems, with scheduled data replication and a tight SLA for each backup system to be brought online on invocation. My business managers are now confident of high availability and we have the main systems ready to go in a DR scenario,' concludes Wakeford.

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'Leased kit meant a small initial outlay and operational costs are very reasonable. And annual failover testing is part of the contract – an essential requirement. Thanks to Newton IT, I now have one less problem to worry about!'

This approach helps the charity to manage the recovery from other incidents such as virus infestations and unstable upgrades.

It is the approach of choice for highly-regulated organisations such as in the City where large organisations will have the choice of at least one other site from which they can switch operations at the flick of a switch.

So, how does this solution work? And how does this provide immediate fail over, causing minimum end user disruption?

Looking at the diagram below we have a typical client environment in the blue box below, The blue box above represents our client's repli-

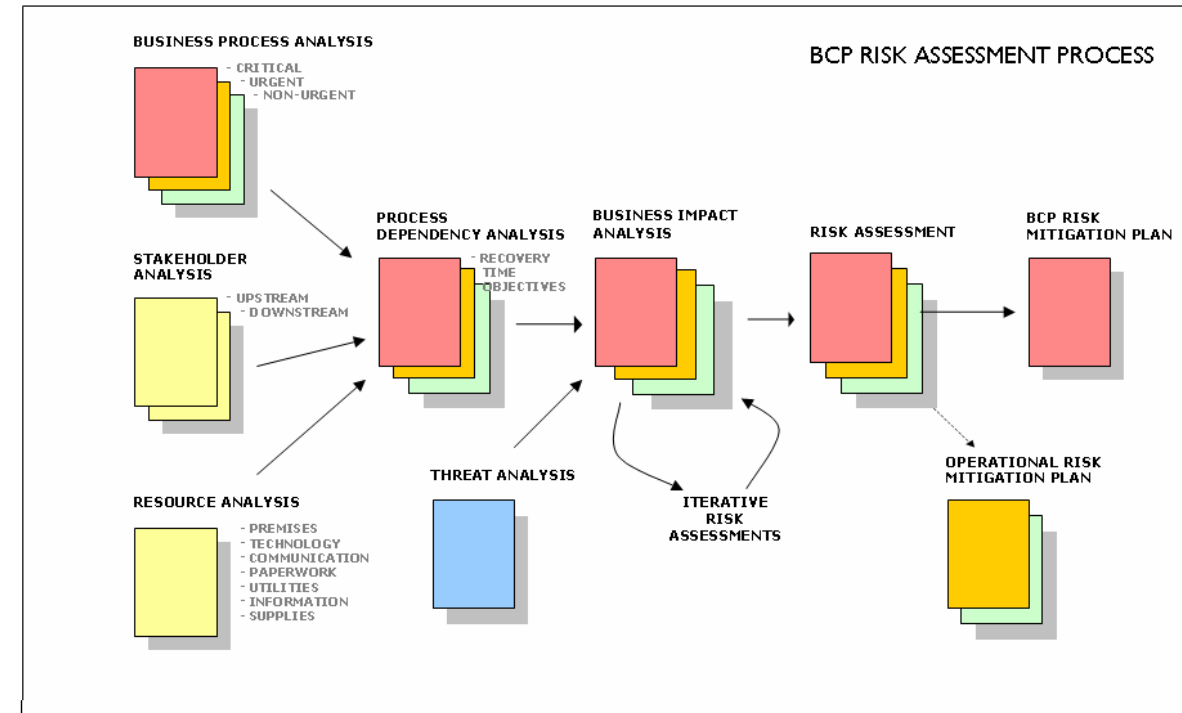
Here we show a one to one disaster recovery service. Depending on the criticality of each server's data, a mixture of real-time or scheduled replication can be chosen.

The purpose of this set-up is to have a replica environment so that in the event of a disaster, i.e. If the client server fails, all users will automatically switch over to the replica environment, seamlessly.

Alternatively, IT managers have the power to manually execute the switch over.

When the faulty server is repaired and brought back on line, then replication begins back to your site from your backup servers at our site. When both sets are back in step then you can switch back to normal operations with no effect on your users.

However, no matter how clever the technology, BCP and DR are not instant solutions to the problem of risk management. They require



repair at the roadside, the short-term fix might get you back on back on your feet, but only long term—dedicated attention to keeping your charity's immune system healthy will keep it out of intensive care Says Wakeford.

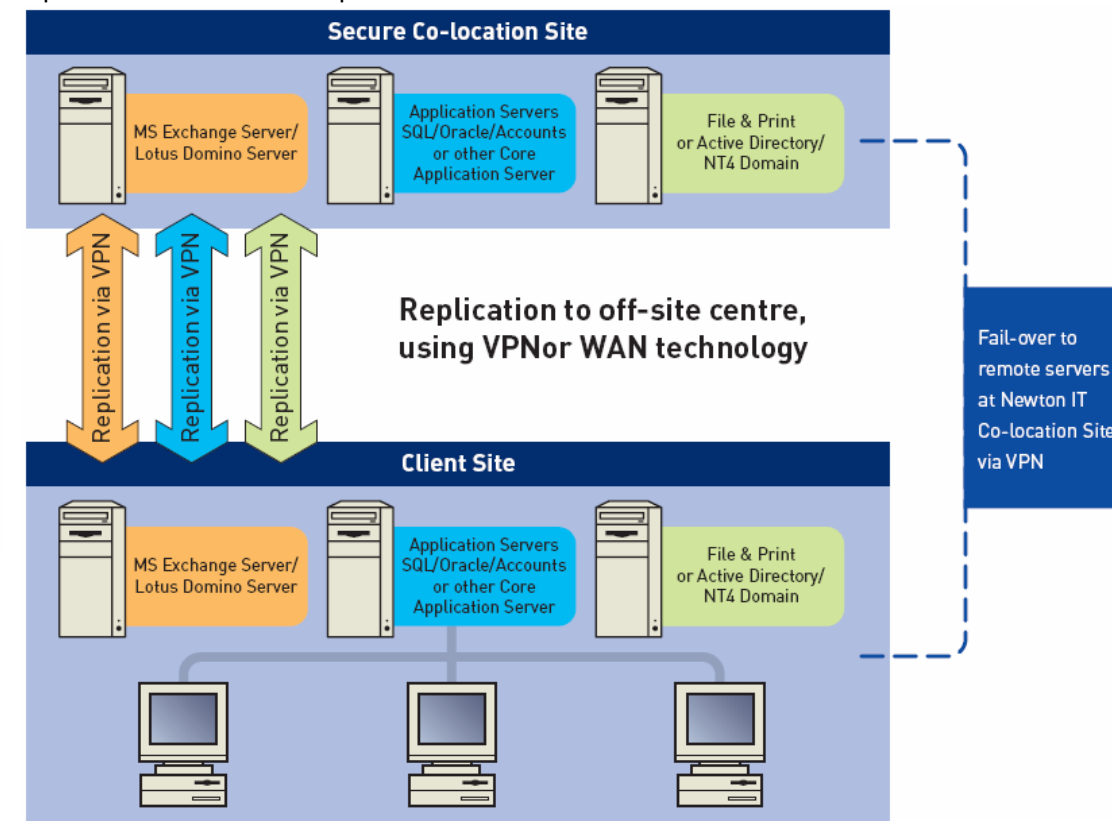
urgent at particular times of the year or month, and others important but non-urgent. Each business process depends on resources and stakeholders – both suppliers (upstream) and clients (downstream). The dependency of each process on resources and resources and stakeholders needs to be analysed in detail to provide a basis for the business impact analysis of the various threats that any charity faces. The business impact analysis should then be subject to iterative risk assessments that can provide assurance about the robustness of any risk assessment.

Staff should contribute their detailed knowledge of business processes, resources and stakeholders to these assessments to make sure that they represent a common understanding across the charity, whilst gaining an understanding of the BCP and buy-in to its conclusions. The risk assessment provides an analysis of risks against their likelihood of occurring and the potential impact if they did occur. Mapping these risks for a particular charity quickly identifies those risks – or disruption scenarios - that should be addressed as part of the

BCP and those that should be addressed as part of business-as-usual operational risk management. This approach is illustrated in the on the diagram above.

This is the point at which all of the work analysing BCP risks comes together in a BCP Risk Mitigation Plan – one element of which is to create, communicate and train staff in a BCP. This is when the real work starts to put in place the arrangements that will try to prevent disasters, but to help the charity support its customers, staff and other stakeholders for when a disaster takes place. One of the main risks to charities is the continuity of their computing systems. BCP for computing systems includes Disaster Recovery (DR) arrangements, that focus on protecting business processes from disruption when business critical servers fail, as recognised by Jacquie Wakeford—ICT Director, Action for Blind People.

If you are implementing a Business Continuity Plan or updating a current version and require assistance, please our Disaster Recovery Team—0208 438 1273.



cated environment at our Disaster Recovery Centre.

long-term attention to the difficult business of staying in business. Like the emergency

A charity's activities can be considered a series of business processes – some critical to the charity's work, some