What if your Disaster Recovery Plan were put to the test?

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Held on July 22, 2015, this webinar on disaster recovery was facilitated by Jim Love, CIO and Chief Digital Officer, ITWC. The following content comprises two articles written about the webinar together with poll questions asked of the participants and their responses.

Prepare for disaster recovery now and mitigate the risks

There's nothing like a major electrical outage or natural disaster to forcibly nudge CIOs and other executives to ensure disaster recovery and business resumption plans are up to date and effective. Unfortunately, while incidents that "wake us up" serve a beneficial purpose, as time passes other priorities will often rise to the top of the list, putting disaster recovery on the back burner; often accompanied with flawed thinking: "it'll have to do for now, I'll make it better later".

But later could be today. And that type of thinking will come back to bite you. From natural disasters to cyber attacks, your systems are always at risk and so too is the rest of your business. The potential downside of delaying the implementation of a sound disaster recovery plan is huge. In a world where a competitor is a mouse click away, even the smallest amount of downtime can result in significant consequences — from the loss of customers to significant legal liabilities and financial losses. Those are not risks to be undertaken lightly or shelved until some future time before dealing with them. The good news is that where disaster recovery and business resumption once involved gargantuan efforts and came with a hefty price tag, disaster recovery today is technically easier, affordable, and can be implemented and maintained more easily than ever, thanks to new services and cloud-based disaster recovery.

So, where do you begin? Properly documented procedures and processes are fundamental to efficient, sound recovery. So too is a comprehensive plan covering all aspects of technology and people and clearly delineating who is responsible for what. Disaster-recovery-as-a-service can help get you back

up and running in no time, but it can't get you there without you doing the upfront work ensuring you've covered off all the bases. Much can also be said about the need to "practice" and having your people familiar with the right steps they need to follow should disaster strike.

More business are turning their thoughts to disaster recovery, recognizing the need to mitigate the risks. And, they are finding that there are a number of key things that everyone should know in order to make this process run smoothly.

When it comes to business disruptions, the adage is only the paranoid survive. Which of course leads one to ponder: when it comes to disaster recovery, are we covered?

Only the paranoid survive: The importance of disaster recovery

That's the question tackled by ITWC CIO Jim Love in this webinar which offered a deep dive on disaster recovery and tips and advice for IT professionals to ensure they have a solid plan in place, developed hand-in-hand with line of business leaders.

While disaster recovery is the commonly used term in the industry, Love said he actually prefers the term business resumption. What's really important isn't just getting the servers back up and the computers back on, but getting employees back to work and business being conducted once more. That goes beyond technology, and beyond just the IT department.

"The difference between disaster recovery and business resumption is in the little details," said Love. The importance of business resumption is underscored when you consider just how long your business can last, and how long your customers will wait, if you're not up and operating. A 2012 study by the Business Continuity Institute found that 74 per cent of organizations view unplanned IT and telecom outages as the top threat to their business.

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>
> *— Jim Love*
> *CIO and Chief*
> *Digital Officer,*
> *ITWC*

And when asked how much downtime their business could sustain, most respondents – 40 per cent – said just one to two days. And 22 per cent could only last hours. Customers aren't going to be patient. "Customers just won't wait that long. It's that simple. Even those polite old Canadian customers aren't going to take what they did in the past," said Love. "Someone is just a click away from taking that customer from you and someone is already spending lots of money trying to bring them over. A disaster creates that opportunity."

Even if you're only down for minutes, Love said customers will leave you, and in a social media world they're not afraid to let everyone know. So it's not really how long you can survive an outage, but how long customers will wait. It's those questions that should inform your business resumption planning.

An Aberdeen Group study pegged the cost of downtime at $700,000 per hour for large companies, and even small companies lost over $8,000 per hour they were down. When you're trying to get buy-in from the business for disaster recovery planning, helping them understand the cost of downtime is the first step.

"People are optimistic by nature and we suck at risk assessment," said Love. "Our minds just don't work well around risk assessment and problems down the road." The list of what could go wrong is a long one, from extreme weather and geological disasters to cyber attacks, vandalism and even human error. In Canada alone, we've seen the forest fires this year in Western Canada cause business disruption, and the Toronto ice storm in 2013 is still fresh in the minds of many.

And it does seem to be on the agenda for CIOs. When asked about their top spending priorities for the year ahead, 49 per cent of technology leaders had disaster recovery as a priority, and 59 per cent cited the broader category of risk, compliance and security.

"If you're a CIO and this isn't on your list, you need to ask why not," said Love. "If you think it's handled and you don't have hard data to prove it, you're taking a pretty big risk."

What's in a plan?

A disaster recovery plan focuses on protecting and recovering the technology stack and is driven by three key metrics: the recovery time objective (RTO), recovery point objective (RPO) and business impact analysis (BIA). RPO is the answer to the question of how much data is at risk, and RTO is when you want to recover.

"Look at the maximum tolerable downtime and ask 'when do we get to serious damage?" and then try to figure out what your recovery time should be. Your RTO should allow a lot of time between its execution and your maximum tolerable downtime," said Love. "You need some breathing room because things go wrong. This is more than just a backup. You need to recover your data, possibly your infrastructure, and your apps, and test it all."

BIA recognizes that there's more to this than just disaster recovery – that's just the first step. If your systems are up but people aren't working, you need more steps in place. For starters, you need an up-to-date crisis communications plan with all the information necessary to contact everyone and get them working again – and it needs to exist somewhere other than on the system that went down.

"The real test is whether you can operate your critical business functions, and if you don't know what those are, you need to find out," said Love. "You need support from the top, and strategies to authorize, enable and encourage regular updates and testing of your plan. And it's not a documentation exercise; it's an engagement exercise."

Something else to consider is whether or not cloud computing and the hybrid enterprise cloud should be part of your business resumption planning.

Cloud has made recovery ubiquitous and cheap, but Love said you still have to think about it, test it, and make sure it works. Check service agreements carefully, and remember that just because you have snapshots, that doesn't mean you can roll back.
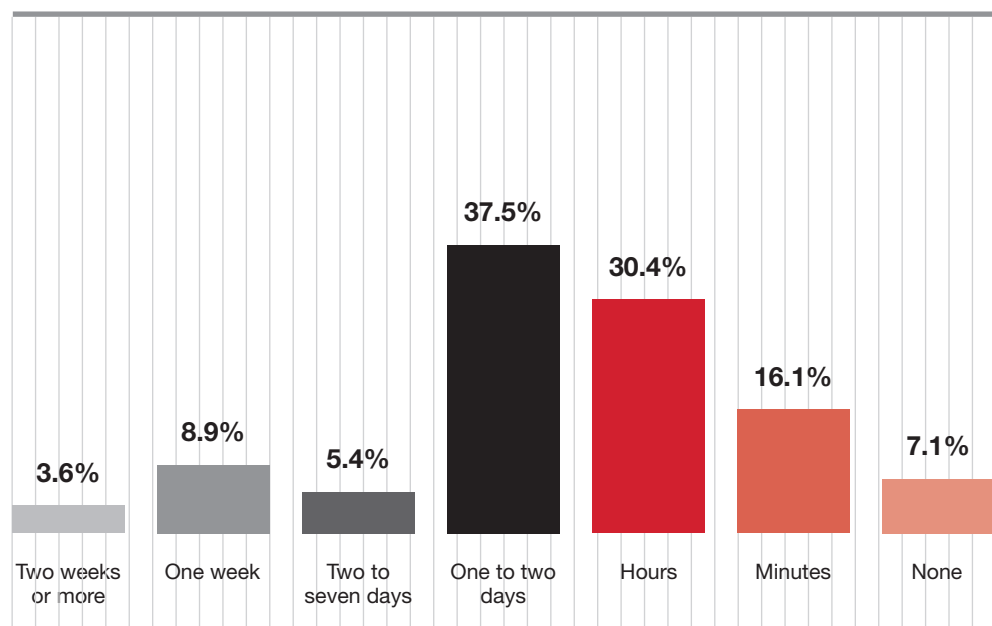
It's also important to remember that disaster recovery is a process that you need to execute and test regularly. Love gives his team scenarios often, telling them to pretend a system just went down and to see how quickly they can recover it, documenting the process and how long it takes.
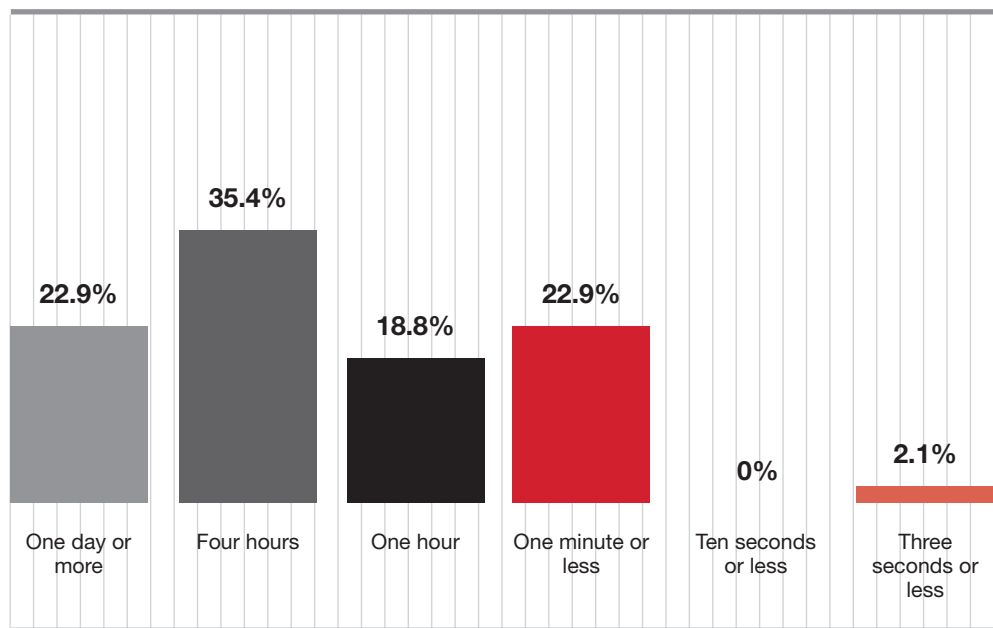
"If people expect it at any time, they stay sharp," said Love. "Testing without lessons learned is a waste of time."

Poll Questions and Answers:

The following charts reveal participants` responses to the poll questions asked during the live webinar:

How much downtime could your business sustain?

Two weeks or more	One week	Two to seven days	One to two days	Hours	Minutes	None
3.6%	8.9%	5.4%	37.5%	30.4%	16.1%	7.1%

How long will your customers wait?

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3.6%	8.9%	5.4%	37.5%	30.4%	16.1%	7.1%
Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more	Two weeks or more