

Continuity Planning



High Availability, Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity:
What's the Difference?

If you think your company has a great disaster recovery plan because you backup every day, or that you don't need to backup because you have highly redundant servers or storage, think again!

High availability, disaster recovery and business continuity planning are as different as a tape measure, a hammer and a power drill. They're all important tools to have in your toolbox but each has a different purpose. Here's why you need all three:

High Availability — How resilient is your network?

Systems designed with high availability in mind protect against interruptions and prevent outages from happening in the first place. They include a storage technology called Redundant Array of Independent Disks (RAID) that writes data across multiple discs. Redundancy is good!

Think of a big rig truck and its multiple rows of tires and you get the idea. If one of the disks (tires) blows out, the system (truck) can keep driving down the highway anyway. There is, of course, a risk-versus-cost aspect to designs that include redundancies, so you'll want to choose the right balance for your risk level.

Disaster Recovery — How quickly will your company get back to work after an IT emergency?

Disaster recovery is about your Recovery Point Objective (RPO) and your Recovery Time Objective (RTO). RPO is the "point" that you

return to after an IT disaster. For example, if you backup every 24 hours, your RPO is a maximum of 24 hours ago. RTO, on the other hand, is how quickly you can restore to your RPO and get back to business. This includes activities like the time it takes to get your spare equipment to start running your backups if your primary equipment isn't working.

Most people don't think about RTO. They know they have a backup and feel confident that they're covered. Running an actual test can usually cure that.

Business Continuity Planning — How, exactly, will your entire business keep functioning during an emergency?

Business continuity planning is a major exercise, and it's much bigger than IT. It covers all the bits and pieces of continuing to run your business in the aftermath of a disaster. It begins with an in-depth understanding of your internal and external threats and includes logistics for all kinds of emergencies, like natural disasters, sabotage, fire and power grid failures. Where are people going to work? What equipment will they use? Who will provide the space? How will you communicate with one another? How will you keep the supply chain flowing?

A company's chief operating officer typically owns the responsibility of maintaining and coordinating the business continuity plan, with the company's IT experts contributing to plan the information and communications systems portion.

The likelihood that your business continuity plan will actually work depends on your disaster recovery plan working, too! Like the tools in your toolbox, if you use your tape measure correctly, you'll drill in the right place. And if not, well, your bookshelf might be crooked or even fall down.

You may also be interested in:

- [Who Owns What? 5 Steps to Protecting Your Company's Intellectual Property](#)
- [Windows 8: How Quickly Should Your Business Make The Leap?](#)
- [How's Your IT Resilience? Top 16 Questions to Ask Your IT Team](#)

