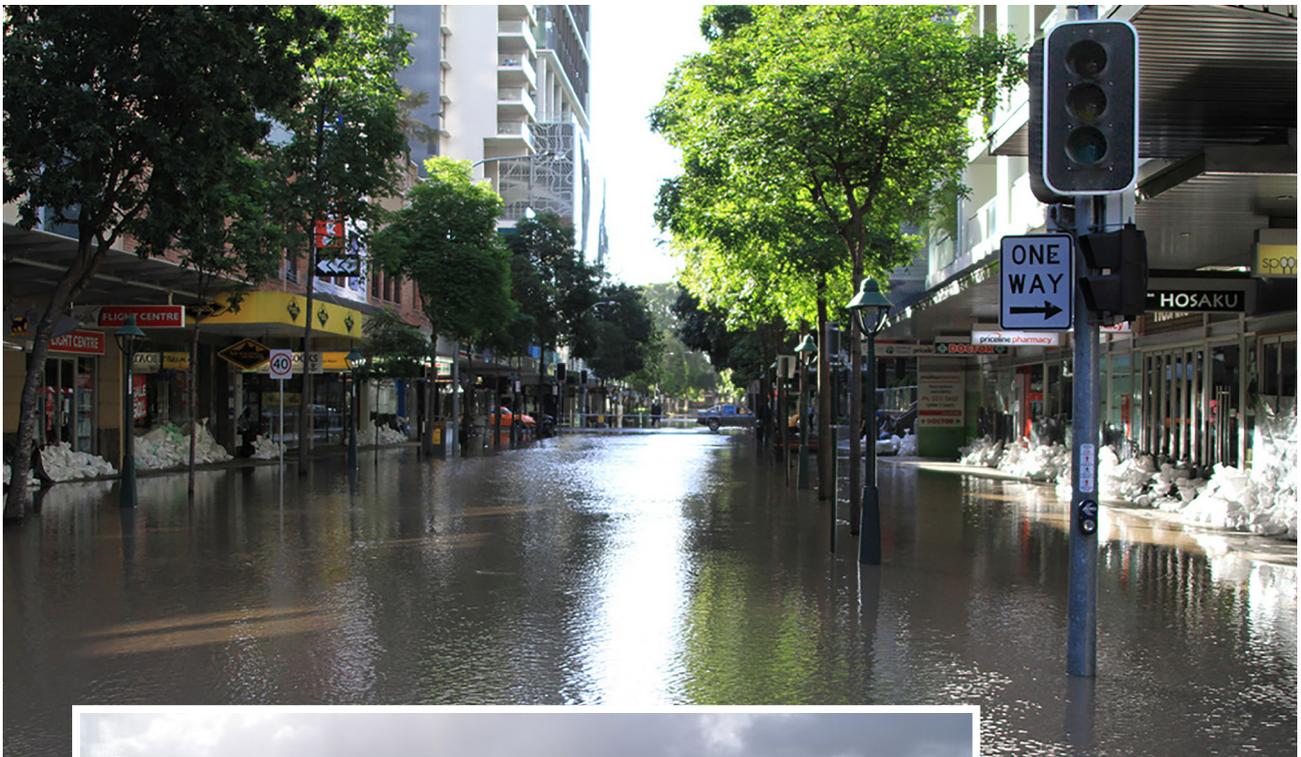




Business Continuity

Best practice in Business Continuity planning and Disaster Recovery Queensland and Brisbane CBD floods recovery – 2011

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Executive Summary

Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and Disaster Recovery (DR) are essential parts of a risk management strategy for any organisation. Any disaster event that causes denial of access to a facility for staff or the inability to access critical data on IT systems can have a major impact on business operations.

How would your company's business continuity or disaster recovery service provider measure up in the event of a disaster?

Interactive, one of Australia's largest systems availability specialists, played a crucial role in the recovery efforts of its customers during the Queensland floods in early 2011. With flooding covering most of Brisbane's CBD, a number of Interactive customers were significantly affected and had to invoke their Business Continuity Plans.

These customers relocated their business operations to Interactive's Disaster Recovery facilities in Eight Mile Plains, where Interactive's experienced disaster recovery specialists provided technical and operational assistance to recover staff facilities and IT systems enabling customers to continue business operations.

All customers assisted during the Queensland floods were able to continue their operations. These customers included major financial institutions who were not only able to carry out normal business but were able to provide emergency relief to flood victims, and a government financial services agency who continued to provide millions of dollars of financial services to government employees.

Introduction: The Value of a Disaster Recovery Solution

Businesses today rely on constant and immediate access to data. The costs involved from unplanned downtime, both financial and reputational, can cause severe damage to organisations and it is important for business leaders to consider how long their business could survive if this data was not available. Whether the data is stored in-house or in virtual and cloud environments, these IT systems and the data it holds is critical to almost all organisations.

Lost production time, inactive users, no internet connection for order management and non-operational payment systems are just some of the effects of downtime which can be of significant detriment to both large and small organisations. An important and often overlooked risk however, is the tangible office space required to continue business operations.

Businesses should not only be thinking about how they will recover their IT systems; they should also consider how their staff will be able to continue to operate in the event of a disaster. As part of any business continuity plan, IT managers need to prepare not only for the physical IT system and data recovery, but also a location for staff to go to that has the facilities they need for business to continue as normal.

In one of the most recent Disaster Recovery Global Data studies conducted by Symantec, it was discovered that 93 per cent of all organisations surveyed had to implement DR plans either in full or partially in 2009.

Other industry statistics show that over 40 per cent of businesses that do not have a DR plan go out of business after a major loss like fire, flooding or sabotage and that the survival rate of businesses without a DR plan is less than 10 per cent.

Disasters, both natural and man-made, are unpredictable and the only way to plan for them is to have a DR and business continuity solution in place for if or when a disaster occurs. The value of having a DR solution in place is being able to ensure business continuity in worst-case scenarios.

Three Quarters of Queensland Declared a Disaster Zone

In late 2010 and early 2011, the state of Queensland in Australia, experienced some of its worst flooding in 35 years. Three quarters of Queensland was declared a disaster zone.

On 11 January 2011, the Brisbane River broke its banks, leading to evacuations in the Brisbane CBD and surrounding suburbs. The flood peaked at 4.46 metres in Brisbane City.

The flooding had a major impact on Brisbane CBD and suburbs along the river. Not only was direct flood damage an issue, areas were cut off from access and widespread power outages occurred as electrical infrastructure was damaged or turned off. As a consequence, many organisations had to cease operation upon evacuation. Those with DR plans in place, however, declared a disaster and implemented these plans immediately.

Proactive Customer Service

As it became apparent that the floods would have a major impact on the CBD, Interactive began to proactively contact customers to determine what their current situation was and to gauge any potential impact the floods may have. This contact was continued at regular intervals until the situation stabilised after day two of the flood.

This proactive contact allowed Interactive to determine how many seats they would require for customers at their recovery centre in the worst-case scenario, and begin preparation of the recovery suites and data centre (DC) at Eight Mile Plains.

Interactive conducts regular and extensive research into the locations of its DCs and recovery centres, to ensure facilities are built in secure locations and remain fully operational at all times, even in the case of a natural disaster. The Eight Mile Plains DC is positioned 50 metres above sea level in an area that was easily accessible following the floods. The building was fully secure and received no flood damage.

Going Above and Beyond

The Queensland flood scenario was a multi-declaration disaster with several Interactive customers officially declaring a disaster within a 30-hour period from 11 January. Six customers eventually operated on-site from Eight Mile Plains, most of which had subscribed to multi-subscriber seat recovery.

Customers with a dedicated solution were allocated seats immediately, with Interactive meeting all requirements outlined in the dedicated Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

Customers with multi-subscriber contracts were initially allocated seats on a pro-rata basis to allow them to begin recovery operations. Interactive then proceeded to go above and beyond their contractual obligations and set up additional facilities to provide more seating for these customers.

Interactive always aims to reduce risk from the outset, increasing availability for customers subscribing to a shared service. Interactive's policy of limiting subscribers to a particular DR centre from a single geographical area or building reduces the risk of services being unavailable due to a multiple-disaster scenario. This ensures high availability of systems in a localised disaster and protects customers from the risks of being second in line for the same equipment. It also limits the number of subscribers on a given platform, again reducing customers' risk.

Eight Mile Plains was set up with multi-subscriber seats at the time the Brisbane River broke its banks, laid out between three different suites. By the end of the disaster event, the multi-subscriber seat capacity was tripled, to cater for all customers who declared. In addition, Interactive offered to accommodate customers in its Sydney and Melbourne Disaster Recovery Centres. One customer relocated staff to Melbourne and successfully continued operations out of a combination of Interactive's Brisbane and Melbourne facilities.

This rapid expansion of facilities was made possible by Interactive's extensive experience in disaster recovery and the internal technical resources it has to react to such events. Specialist disaster recovery engineers were flown in from Sydney and Melbourne to assist the local teams and customers with their recovery.

Network and technical specialists were also brought in to set up additional networks and assist with IT recovery operations. Additional Relationship Managers provided customer support and communication functions, in order to assist customers through this critical period.

Interactive also shipped additional equipment such as desktops and telephone headsets from interstate to provide this overflow capacity.

For organisations to operate seamlessly after a disaster, staff require meeting rooms, phones, parking and many other elements they have come to expect in order to conduct their everyday work. All of this and more was provided at Interactive's Eight Mile Plains recovery suites.

Meeting rooms were in high demand, with customers holding crisis, management and board meetings to plan next steps. Interactive promptly sourced more meeting rooms by hiring extra space within the Technology Park, as well as freeing up management offices to house the demand.

Engineers and staff worked around the clock to manage the general logistics involved with having 200 people on site at one time and implementing customer DR solutions.

Not wanting to turn away any customers in their time of need, Interactive also assisted two customers who had not yet finalised their setup at Interactive's DR facility. Due to the nature of the situation and the risk imposed to their business, emergency relocation of equipment and racks was undertaken and set up overnight by Interactive engineers. The emergency moves resulted in both customers continuing their business operations with zero business impact.

Interactive's services are designed to meet customers' business continuity and compliance requirements. Delivering high levels of service with low risk at a cost-effective price, Interactive aims to meet and exceed its contractual obligations under all circumstances. The customer service displayed during the Brisbane flood disaster is evidence of this commitment.

Ensuring Business Continuity

Interactive customers that declared during the disaster were largely financial institutions, including banks and insurance companies who had been cut off from the CBD due to the evacuation. Many also experienced flooding of their office buildings, meaning they had no access to physical office space or IT systems.

With 24-hour service and support expected from their customers and with increased business demands being made due to the floods, having a Business Continuity solution in place with Interactive allowed these organisations to continue critical business operations and reduce any financial loss or risk to reputation.

A major financial institution was able to make critical payments to Centrelink from the DR facility in Eight Mile Plains, which in turn was distributing crucial funds for flood relief victims.

A Government Services Agency was also able to continue to provide financial services to government employees. This company's transition to disaster recovery was so seamless, that the Government was completely unaware the company was flood-affected.

Call centres were also relocated to Interactive, ensuring the general public could still call and speak to someone for advice and reassurance.

Working in the DR industry for over 20 years, ensuring business continuity and systems availability is Interactive's core competency. Extensive testing and experience over the years in handling smaller more localised disasters coupled with supreme dedication to customer satisfaction ensured Interactive was able to successfully cater for all customer requests and minimise the impact to their businesses.

Learnings from the Brisbane Floods

The Brisbane floods were an extreme example and a stark reminder of what can occur during disaster events. Businesses must be prepared for not only these catastrophic events but more localised issues that can interrupt business process and cause significant impact to costs relating to damage.

The scale of the flooding challenged many business' disaster recovery plans. Some customers had multiple sites affected. Others had critical staff that could not get to recovery sites due to flooding of their homes or suburbs. Services were disrupted and affected. Public transport virtually stopped and communications channels became overloaded. People stuck at home lost connectivity with the outside world as electricity was cut off for days.

The flooding affected so many people on different levels that some of the assumptions made during business continuity planning were simply not relevant.

What was clear though, was those customers that had tried and tested Business Continuity Plans were in a position to minimise the impacts of these extraordinary events and could continue critical business functions.

Interactive did take some learnings from the situation and implemented customer requests while customers were at the Eight Mile Plains facility, to provide a better service wherever possible.

Interactive has increased the size of the Brisbane Disaster Recovery facilities, as well as increasing the multi-subscriber seats capacity three-fold. It has also built dedicated facilities for existing and future customers.

Meeting rooms and facilities have also been increased. Processes for handling multiple disaster declarations and handling large volumes of staff have been improved.

How Interactive Can Help

Whilst natural disasters are something that every business should be prepared for, other scenarios can also result in disaster for a business critical IT system. Fire, break-in and sabotage, for example, are frequent occurrences that can cause great threat to business critical IT systems. In fact, according to the analyst firm IDC, employees or insiders carried out 70 per cent of all successful attacks on computer networks.

Rapid recovery of an organisation's systems, people and processes has become an essential component of risk management strategies and Interactive is able to offer flexibility, optimised system uptime, subscriber risk management, responsiveness and multiple facilities through tailored business continuity plans.

With access to transport and car parking, office recovery workstations, state of the art communications available from Telstra, Optus, Uecomm, AAPT, Nextgen, Pipe Networks and Spiderbox all from a secure facility, IT managers can feel safe knowing their staff, as well as vital processes and operations, can continue uninterrupted in the event of a disaster.

Instead of imposing inflexible, off-the-shelf solutions, Interactive customises its business continuity services to customers' needs, all guaranteed with a dedicated engineer who will contact you within 10 minutes of receiving your call and can be on-site within two hours of receiving your call.

Interactive is the largest specialist provider of DR services to the Australian market, providing services to some of Australia's most respected organisations from three first class recovery centres in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Interactive has a proud history of recovering clients from real life disaster situations and has been providing these services since 1992.

Conclusion

Critical IT systems are the backbone of any organisation and risk management should always factor in a DR and business continuity plan. Interactive's management of the recovery following the 2011 Queensland floods is a great demonstration of how businesses can continue to operate in the midst of multi-declaration disasters, with the correct set up and by the provider listening to what the customer needs.

Interactive offers business continuity solutions to suit any organisation's size or budget.



About Interactive Pty Ltd

Established in 1988, Interactive is one of Australia's most respected IT service providers. With a focus on systems availability and customer service, Interactive and its team of over 350 dedicated service staff is the supplier of choice for more than 1,900 of Australia's most successful corporations.

Experts in cloud computing, hardware maintenance, data centre hosting, managed services and disaster recovery, Interactive's five world-class data centres ensure customers can be confident that business critical data is securely stored.

Interactive operates its business carbon neutral, ensuring that all operations and cloud solutions have a zero carbon footprint.

To find out more about Interactive, visit www.interactive.com.au