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Most Companies Walk a High-Wire E-Mail Risk Without a Net

By Chris Preimesberger

A new survey reveals that more than half of all businesses have no e-mail backup and recovery plan in place.

A new study confirms what a great many people in IT already suspected: Companies of all sizes are vulnerable to costly and damaging e-mail outages because they trust their messaging infrastructure to a single server and do not have an adequate backup and recovery plan in case of a disaster.

ApplicationContinuity.org surveyed 434 IT professionals responsible for e-mail continuity in small (0-99 employees), medium (100-999 employees) and large (1,000 or more employees) enterprises. ResearchCorp.org provided the analysis.

The goal was to determine whether companies are prepared to deliver e-mail continuity—particularly for Microsoft Exchange—and whether companies have a plan in place to secure e-mail communication during a local or sitewide failure or downtime event.

“Given the excellent messaging continuity solutions that have emerged in the past few years, it’s alarming to see how many companies still aren’t proactively implementing the right mix of technologies to keep their e-mail systems up and running around the clock,” said Craig Stouffer of ResearchCorp.org. “Whether this is a budget issue or an awareness issue is unclear, but for many companies the hard truth is that much more could—and should—be done to protect them from experiencing the devastating effects that e-mail downtime can have on their bottom line.”

Key findings included the fact that less than half of the respondents have a reactive disaster recovery plan in place; only 46 percent of respondents have currently implemented a high-availability solution of some type, and the definition varies widely to include data backup solutions that do not deliver high availability of business-critical applications such as e-mail.

Only 21 percent of respondents have implemented a disaster avoidance strategy, while 29 percent of midsized companies are operating with only a single Exchange server, and have no application continuity plan in place. More than 50 percent of the responding companies that have a continuity solution in place for Exchange are only backing up files or file systems, and are not backing up the Exchange application for an immediate recovery in the event of a server failure or site outage.

The survey group included a wide range of industry verticals, with financial services, high-tech and manufacturing accounting for the top three represented. Ninety-seven percent of respondents are based in the United States, and 60 percent use Microsoft Exchange, confirming Microsoft’s market leadership position in the corporate e-mail market.

The survey also looks at migration plans for Exchange 2007, as well as industry-specific requirements for compliance or legal discovery solutions.

“Companies clearly recognize the mission-criticality of e-mail, with 95 percent of surveyed companies viewing it as essential to business operations,” said Eric Burgener, senior analyst with The Taneja Group.

“Additional survey findings on cost, impact and frequency of e-mail outages underline strongly that e-mail is a system where proactive disaster avoidance, rather than just disaster recovery, will pay high dividends,” Burgener said.

A full copy of the report is available ApplicationContinuity.org or Teneros.com.

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