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CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR CONTACT CENTRES

You have e-enabled your business. Your call centre is now a multimedia contact centre. Customers can contact you via telephone, web, email, even web collaboration and voice over internet. And they expect you to answer their inquiries quickly, accurately and courteously. Your contingency plan allows your business to handle anything from sudden spikes in demand to catastrophic equipment or network failures.

You do have a contingency plan, don't you?

Often Overlooked, But Still Needed

Despite the fact that some businesses ignore the need for a contingency plan, disaster can strike at any time, in many ways, and you need to be prepared. After all, would a customer in another part of the country expect calls to go unanswered because a snowstorm interrupted your Halifax call centre?

The starting point of your contingency plan is assessment of critical business functions, and the risk to the company of an interruption. Typically, loss of an inbound sales or reservation centre for more than a few hours could cause a business threatening loss of revenue or customer goodwill. Yet the risk of loss must be balanced against the cost of implementing and maintaining backup or hot standby capabilities.

As a rule, you should focus your recovery plans on revenue producing parts of the business.

As call centres become more integrated, they also have more points of failure. **If your database server failed, could your agents still do their jobs effectively?** High availability systems, failover procedures and training are needed for mission critical hardware components during outages.

Remember, even something as simple as a fire alarm could leave the phones unanswered for 30 minutes or more. The key is to plan in advance to route calls to a courtesy response emergency announcement. In fact, for some businesses, Select Routing (pre-planned call routing instructions stored with your service provider) means one call can get you up and running quickly.

If redirecting to another corporate location is not possible, consider contracting the services of a business continuity firm who'll provide facilities where your agents can be relocated to handle calls on a temporary basis. Backup copies of corporate and customer data may also be stored there for fast recovery.

Not Just Disaster Recovery

Unanticipated increases in demand also need advance consideration. Snowstorms, floods, and other weather phenomena may cause a service industry's call centres to be overwhelmed with calls. If your data network or computer systems failed, a sudden influx of trouble calls could overwhelm your help desk. Careful preplanning will ensure extra capacity is available on demand. Preplanned IVR scripting and Call Prompter

(prerecorded) announcements can route general inquiries to an announcement, reducing demand on attendants. This ensures that high priority calls can still be answered.

What can a contingency plan help you do?

- Define critical business functions
- Determine the risks and acceptability of any outages and potential losses
- Evaluate points of failure and potential causes
- Predefine workarounds and solutions
- Ensure the right people will be mobilized to implement your contingency plan

Defined, Designed and Tested

Once your plan is defined, it must be tested on a regular basis. Switch over to your backup routing instructions. Check to see if the alternate call centre can handle the calls and respond effectively. Provide a clear backup implementation and restoral plan. Designate specific employees or positions to manage the process. Create lists of suppliers and business partners that must be notified of a problem. Provide cell phones to ensure you can still reach the outside world if communication lines are cut.

Now that your plan has been designed and tested, re-evaluate and update it regularly, especially after any major change or expansion of your business or product line. Make your contingency plan an integral part of your contact centre business operations.

And keep your customers happy.

For more information on Courtesy Response, Select Routing, Call Prompter or any other AT&T Canada services, please contact your AT&T Canada Sales Representative or visit us at www.attcanada.com.

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Telecommunications Made Eeeeeasyyyyyyy...

Global Dial-Up Internet. Access. Anytime. Anywhere.

You're on business in Argentina. You've just received a call from head office – your biggest client in Chicago needs a crucial document emailed right away. You're the only one with the latest information but your service provider doesn't offer Internet roaming outside of Canada. Telling them that you will be back in the office in three days is unacceptable.

What do you do?

When your employees travel or work remotely, a reliable dial-up Internet access service – available globally – becomes a necessary component of your business communications solution. When choosing a global dial-up Internet service, look for the following key benefits:

- Is business-focused and highly available with proven network reliability
- Provides high quality, reliable remote access with a “no busy” network and seamless remote call forwarding
- Facilitates future growth with scalable solutions
- Allows traveling employees to use the same ID and password from any of the global points of presence (POP)
- Provides peace-of-mind with worldwide, around-the-clock hotline support in English and in the local languages
- Ensures ease in doing business with a single point of contact for all concerns

While broadband technologies grab all the headlines, dial-up access continues to play an important role in how customers conduct business over the Internet.

— Geoff Ledingham, Senior Product Manager, AT&T Canada

In a nutshell, a business-grade global dial-up service allows remote or travelling employees to gain access to the Internet for email, web browsing or to connect to their corporate LAN for file access. Employees can get online fast by accessing one of many points of presence (POP) located around the world available at pre-determined rates. Many vendors also include proprietary dial-up software supporting auto-update capabilities, busy-signal redirects, and automatic POP selection. Customer support is typically provided 24/7 in English and all local dialects.

What Else Do I Need To Know?

Here are some questions that you should ask a prospective vendor when considering a global dial-up Internet access solution for your company:

- Do you have an international roaming service?
- What is your global coverage?
- Do the international roaming rates vary by country?
- Is the network consistent and reliable in all countries?
- How is this service maintained and supported?
- How easy is this dialer software to use and roll out for multiple users?
- If I am an existing Internet customer, do you offer consolidated billing?

Now you've got the power to leverage your business advantages all over the world. And working in Argentina has never been easier.

For more information about AT&T Canada's Global Business Dial-up service, please visit <http://www.attcanada.ca/global>.

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Just So You Know...

- Companies are attracted to 1-800 toll-free numbers for one major reason: a 1-800 number gives customers added incentive to call your company rather than your competitors.
- The top three industry sectors for self-employment in Canada are Professional, Scientific, Technical Services (15.1%), Construction (12.6%) and Retail Trade (9.7%).
- According to comScore Networks, during the week ending February 17, 2002, 6.02 million unique visitors worldwide visited msnbc.com and another 1.71 million visited nbcolympics.com. comScore also reports that of the 990,000 who visited saltlake2002.com. during that period, 56% were non-US.
- Micrologic Research's study of the worldwide cellular telephone market predicts that cellular telephone shipments will rise from an estimated 463 million in 2002 to 475.9 million by 2003.
- Gartner Dataquest estimates that the worldwide storage services market generated revenue of \$25 billion in 2001, but that it will grow to \$26 billion in 2002 and \$41 billion in 2005.
- According to Ipsos-Reid, the average Canadian family spends more than 32 hours per week online, and that 20% of all families with home Internet access have computers that have been networked to others within the home.
- Camels have three eyelids to protect themselves from blowing sand.



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Keep Your Network Under Lock & Key

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Ever wonder what it would be like to be the target of a professional hack? If your house or car has ever been broken into, you have an idea. There's a feeling of violation that is both frightening and maddening all at once. Imagine company secrets exposed and leaked to competitors. Or worse, your client base's confidential information made public. That is a PR and legal nightmare you definitely want to avoid.

An Ounce of Prevention...

The question is, are you SURE you're doing everything possible to prevent this from happening to YOU? Just because you think your network is leak-free, does that mean it really is?

The second you connect to the Internet, you become a potential target. The first step towards securing yourself – and many would say the most critical – is to conduct a Vulnerability Assessment of your systems and network. This service comes in many flavours, and obviously, the more you choose to do, the safer your systems are likely to be.

While it's obvious that a Vulnerability Assessment will help you identify and plug some potentially exploitable holes in your network, there are other reasons to have this service completed.

Many companies have a third party assessment upon entering into partnerships with other firms. It comes down to a credibility and trust factor that can make or break these partnerships. Secondly, whatever the investment is – and it ranges based on vendor, scope of the procedure and the complexity of the network – it is nowhere near as costly as being victimized.

Medical Metaphor

Think of a checkup with your physician, who conducts many tests to check your health. From there, your doctor can diagnose any issues, provide short-term care and set up long-term cure if necessary. Consider vulnerability assessments as checkups for your network and systems.

Here's a list of the main test components that you can expect of a typical Vulnerability Assessment:

- External Network

Vulnerability Assessment

This is a test whereby the vendor will identify possible vulnerability points by having an ethical hacker simulate a malicious attempt to infiltrate the network from an external source using TCP/IP access. The extent of any damage to be caused as a result of the security breach, if any, would be fully determined by the client.

- Internal Network Vulnerability Assessment

This is a test whereby the vendor will identify possible internal vulnerability points by having an ethical hacker simulate a malicious attack from within the network. Once again, the extent of damage is fully determined by the client.

- Host-Based Risk Assessment

This is an internal test that attempts to identify and restrict the movements of either the network administrator or an unauthorized visitor. It identifies the security weaknesses that are built into systems and are not viewable from the network layer. It helps to harden the system security to an extent that if a system is compromised, the escalation of privileges can be controlled.

- Database Risk Assessment

This is the process of executing standard predefined database security policies against your system in an effort to identify any inconsistencies or potential risks to your database.

- Application Risk Assessment

This test identifies and discovers new vulnerabilities, and looks for invalidated activity in custom built as well as vendor provided applications, at the user interface level; reviewing how you're managing at an application level.

- Security Architecture

This is a test that assesses your current security system. How is your current security system set up? What safeguards are in place? Is your architecture in compliance with the industry's best practices? Is your architecture robust enough to withstand well planned network attacks, etc.?

What does this mean to you?

Knowing your company's current state of security is paramount to creating a security architecture that protects your business. Periodically assessing your administrative and technology architecture to determine the threats and risks to which your organization is exposed will keep you, your customers, data and partners secure and protected.

Some Questions To Ponder...

The following are some key questions you may want to ask when selecting a vendor to provide your solution.

- How do you actually execute the assessment?
- How thorough is the assessment?
- How long have you been conducting these assessments?
- Who are some of your current clients?
- How long does it take to conduct a typical assessment?
- What is the investment model? Is it a one-time payment or can it be done on a pre-determined timeframe?
- What guarantees do you offer in terms of your ethical hacking?

The key is to understand your risks and weaknesses, and learn how to stop those threats from crippling your business or compromising your clients.

Make it your business to protect your business.

For more information about AT&T Canada's Vulnerability Assessment Solutions, check out www.attcanada.ca/business/security.html



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Outsourcing: a Balance Sheet of the Future

futurescope

Among the countless mantras of the digital economy, one has remained at the forefront of many business growth strategies: Outsourcing. Successful companies know they are not in the business of running their company, they are in the business of building it. By offloading some of the routine management of day-to-day corporate administrivia, it's easier to focus on the core business. While generally speaking, the pros outweigh the cons of outsourcing, the strategy comes with its own set of challenges and risks. Here is a primer on where the key strategic opportunities for outsourcing will lie in the next four years and, more importantly, areas of which you should steer clear.

First, Watch The Demographics

As with all forecasting, watch for growth in categories where demographics will shape the business environment. With baby boomers nearing early (and active!) retirement, many will want to remain working in some capacity, similar to the consulting trend we saw a decade ago when companies slashed the middle-management layer. Compounding this problem, there aren't enough new workers in the H.R. pipeline to fill positions lost through attrition – employers will once again be competing with increasing demands of a short-supply skills market.

Two Telework Strategies

To help alleviate both problems, consider telework offerings. If your firm offers flexible workspace options (such as working from home a few days a week) you'll be ahead of the game in the looming labour shortage. I believe two key technologies will emerge to help this demand. First, virtual private networks (VPNs) will offer a secure tunnel into your corporate network from anywhere on the

public internet. And campus-wide wireless LANs will extend your data grid to more relaxed areas of your office, common project workspaces, and so on. (Wait for 802.11a technologies in the coming year which will provide stronger security and much higher bandwidth.)

Don't Lose The Customer Connection

Outsourcing is not the answer for all business operations, though. In general, be wary about ceding control of any point where customers and partners come into direct contact. For instance, while it's probably wise that you consider outsourcing the management of technology behind your call centre – especially now that a smart call centre integrates phone, 800, web, email, fax, and wireless – you would not want to outsource the actual CSRs taking the calls. Your front-line people should be your people, trained on your products and services, and most importantly given the full authority to make any call they deem necessary to find a solution to an inbound customer issue.

Security Is The Secret

Regardless of which business functions you decide to outsource, you should at least have a security partner working with your IT department. Managing security, especially for larger companies, is a full-time task involving constant research, patch rollouts, considering requests for user-specific applications, and end-user education. Likely, your IT staff are already trying to manage the growing needs of your business – by providing a partner to help configure security tools, this can relieve the burden a great deal. You should also hire a second company (sometimes called “white hat hackers” to test your partner's work.)

Get A Guarantee

Don't sign any outsourcing contract without negotiating the service levels you can expect and reimbursement schedules. Solid partner firms will offer a variety of service levels to match your uptime requirement and budget, but know going in what these are. Also make sure you have a single human contact that will work on your account and will act as your advocate within their organization – you do not want to be on hold for two hours while your e-commerce site is on the fritz!

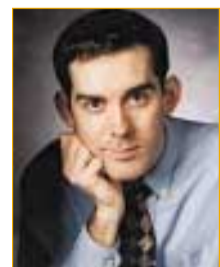
The Bottom Line

Outsourcing is certainly an area you'll see grow in the coming years. From renting web-based desktop applications to designing and rolling out large-scale WAN implementations, having a partner can help your business focus on its core strengths. But be sure to keep your company's true core – your customers – within the walls of your domain and you'll be many steps ahead!

Tod Maffin is “one of Canada's most influential futurists” [Report on Business] and speaks to more than 50 conferences each year on the future of technology in small- and medium-sized business. He hosts “Future Now” on CBC Television. His web site is www.todmaffin.com

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by Tod Maffin
Technology Futurist and Broadcaster





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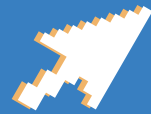
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FEEDBACK

Here's your chance to tell us how you feel about Sphere.

What did you like?

What didn't you like?

What's missing that you would you like to see?

And most of all, what would you like to learn from Sphere and from AT&T Canada?

Please send your feedback to spherefeedback@attcanada.com

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