



Disaster Recovery for Microsoft Small Business Server

Plan B Disaster Recovery Plc

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Abstract

Microsoft Windows Small Business Server offers small businesses Microsoft's front line server applications all in one affordable integrated package, running on a single computer. No wonder it's popular. But the down side of having everything on one computer is that all your "eggs are all in one basket". What happens if disaster strikes and your Small Business Server is permanently damaged, stolen or no longer available?

Microsoft's solution is to recover from your backups. But did you know that on average about 20% of backups fail, and even if yours are OK it could take up to ten days to rebuild a new machine, recover all your data and get the system running again in a network?

How long could your business do without all its computer systems before customers go elsewhere and the business suffers irreparable damage?

What's needed is a simple, inexpensive, guaranteed disaster recovery service that will give you back a working system in minutes and let you handle your particular disaster rather than be simply subject to it.

This White Paper looks at the issue of Disaster Recovery for Microsoft Small Business Server, the options available and in particular the solution offered by Plan B.

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The beauty and risk of Windows Small Business Server

Microsoft Windows Small Business Server (SBS) offers small businesses Microsoft's front line server applications all in one affordable integrated package, running on a single computer.

No wonder it's popular. But the down side of having everything on one computer is that "all your eggs are in one basket". And it's quite a complicated basket too, because although Microsoft have packaged all their applications up to make them easy and affordable for smaller businesses to buy, they are still - under the covers - fundamentally the same enterprise class software products they sell to their biggest customers.

What happens if disaster strikes and your Small Business Server is permanently damaged, stolen or no longer available? Remember, no-longer available could be anything from a proper biblical style fire, flood or act of God, a terrorist attack, a significant hardware or software failure, malicious damage by a disgruntled employee, a simple mistake by your IT support engineer, your server being stolen, a virus or hacker attack, to the police not letting you access your building for a period because of a local unconnected emergency.

How a business prepares for and handles such unexpected disasters underlines its quality and is a good indicator of its long-term success.

Such disasters are a real risk. A recent survey by the UK's Chartered Management Institute showed that when looking at threats, businesses of all sizes thought that an IT disaster was the most likely to significantly impact costs and revenue, and at the same time is the most commonly experienced disruption.

The great risk with Small Business Server is that if you lose your server you lose all your business services together. Potentially, not only will you not be able to run the business but your website might be down and many customers, prospects and suppliers may think you have disappeared altogether!

Microsoft's solution for disaster recovery is to recover from your backups. But did you know that on average about 20% of backups fail, and even if yours are OK it could take up to seven or more days to rebuild a new machine, recover all your data and get the system running again in a network?

You also have to factor in who will do this work and are they available. If you outsource your IT service (as many SBS customers do) then you need to know how quickly your service provider can react and also how high up his priority list you are. If your IT support is in-house, can you cope with a disaster during the holiday period or, even worse, if your IT manager is part of the disaster.

How long could your business do without all its computer systems before customers go elsewhere and the business suffers irreparable damage?

What's needed is a simple, inexpensive, guaranteed disaster recovery service that will give you back a working system in minutes and let you handle your particular disaster rather than be simply subject to it.

So why might it take so long to rebuild a Small Business Server?

Having a working backup

Many businesses think that because they take backups they are protected from disasters. But don't get confused; backups are primarily for getting you out of a hole when you accidentally delete/lose/corrupt data on your basically working machine.

If you lose that machine completely then the backup will only help once you have replaced and rebuilt your system. And replacing and rebuilding isn't as simple as it sounds and can take a long time before you have a working system again.

You should also know that taking a backup isn't the same as 'having' a good working backup. Backup processes have a justly-deserved reputation for letting you down when you need them most – they're easy to break, and because checking them is time consuming, boring and a distraction from day to day pressures they tend not to be well monitored and certainly virtually never tested.

So taking backups is not the same as having a recovery provision.

It's worth noting that if your recovery plan is based on backups only, you should check regularly that your backups are actually working, and understand that you have only covered the first step and plan to be without your working systems for typically around 3 to 7 days (depending on how organised and lucky you are). Also remember that if you want to guard against a disaster that physically destroys your machines, then your backups need to be off-site - well out of harms way.

Replacing and rebuilding a new server

Buying a new server and rebuilding it into a working system isn't as simple as it sounds. I'd like to suggest that unless you've got a detailed, documented plan of how you'd go about it, then your backups, even if they're great, have rather missed the point. After all – what really matters to you is not that your data is 'safe' (important, but in a rather academic sense), but that it's useful. If you can't interact with it, then it's not doing anything useful for you.

So, if we just take a simple scenario for bringing a system back, including its backup, you might have a process that looks like:

- 1) Make sure you've got all the kit you need. Remember that not all kit is immediately available (Dell build machines to order and can take a couple of weeks to deliver, Cisco devices have a habit of not being in the channel when you want them, and tape drives and libraries aren't always easy to acquire at the drop of a hat)
- 2) Retrieve operating system media (was it destroyed?)
- 3) Locate activation key for operating system (where is this?)
- 4) Re-install the operating system
- 5) Patch the operating system (assuming Internet connectivity is good)

- 6) Locate backup software media
- 7) Locate activation key for backup software
- 8) Install backup software
- 9) Insert first tape and integrate tape database back into the backup software database
- 10) Identify and retrieve all tapes in cycle
- 11) Start full restoration

So... we're eleven steps in, five of those steps require you to either have a copy of something, or to get bits from somebody else, and we've not got the machine back up and running properly yet. Now, you can argue the odd point in and out, but the fact remains that it's a complex process, and that unless you've done it from a realistic starting point a couple of times, you've really got no right to expect it to work when you need it. Tragically, most businesses don't try, partly because it's all downside for IT (a bunch of work, and a high possibility of them not covering themselves in glory), and it's all downside for the business, as it's undoubtedly going to have to spend some money on the adventure.

A really great test is to ask whoever provides IT support for the Small Business Server how long they think it will realistically take to recovery your system from just a tape back up to a fully working system.

Rebuilding a Small Business Server

Rebuilding a Small Business Server in particular has its challenges. This primarily goes back to the 'all your eggs in one basket' issue. Because SBS has a number of key applications that might otherwise be found on separate servers the rebuild process is often longer and more complicated.

This is especially so because SBS includes a single copy of Active Directory that controls user access, security controls and a number of other key functions. Without Active Directory nothing will work and if anything goes wrong with its restore then it becomes very difficult to diagnose.

Its worth noting that in other circumstances Microsoft recommends running at least two copies of Active Directory on separate machines for this very reason!

Making it work in a crisis

Of course rebuilding a server in the midst of a crisis is even more difficult. The business will want its system back as fast as possible and the pressure to deliver will increase with time. This tends to result in, at best, compromises being made to get the system back faster, or, at worst, errors being made that make the whole process take longer.

Ideal Disaster Recovery provision for a Small Business Server

Because of the nature of Small Business Servers they are typically run by companies with limited or no in-house IT support. The businesses are also often completely reliant on their one server and loss of it could quickly start to cause lasting operational and reputational damage.

The limited nature of IT support means that it is harder to carry out system maintenance and repetitive low level tasks like server backups are also often at risk. If backups are run consistently they are almost never tested and as mentioned previously backups are notorious for failing without indication. Yet backups are almost always the only recovery route businesses have in the event of a loss of the server.

Limited IT support also means that small companies have less scope to handle an IT disaster internally.

As such the ideal Disaster Recovery Service for businesses that typically run Small Business Server would be a service that they can be completely confident will work (who wants to buy a solution that doesn't work when you eventually need it!), is fast so the business can get back in control quickly (and be seen to get back in control), simplifies the IT requirement rather than complicates it, and of course one that is very cost effective.

So the ideal disaster recovery provision needs to include the following types of features:

- Complete certainty of a fast recovery of completely working systems that can be used immediately
- A service that can be invoked in the absence of IT staff
- Minimum data loss – Up to 24hrs acceptable in emergency
- Simplicity to reduce IT burden, ensure ease of setup and minimum maintenance.
- Cost effective solution with minimum or no capital requirement

Traditional Disaster Recovery options

Why do so many businesses fail to prepare properly for IT disasters? Well, the fact is that IT disaster recovery (DR) is complicated. Doing it well using traditional methods requires a lot of planning, and you'll have to keep on updating the plan if it isn't going to be totally useless by the time you want it. Testing the plan properly is almost never done, as it's got a tendency to be ruinously time-consuming. This has left many with either cheap inadequate provisions or worse, expensive provisions that fall short of protecting the business.

The drawbacks of traditional approaches are that the solutions that stand a chance of recovering working systems in a reasonable timescale (such as warm or hot standbys) are costly (in fact, depending on your solution, prices can range from the inconveniently pricey to the truly legendary) and those that are cheaper (such as rebuilds from backups or stored images) are probably going to mean you will be without working systems for quite a long time. Also the unknown elements in the cheaper alternatives mean that there is little certainty as to how long you will have to wait for working systems. However, the new technology of server

virtualisation is opening up all sorts of new options for disaster recovery that are much cheaper and more effective.

If you combine such virtualisation technology with a managed service you can potentially create the ideal disaster recovery service for a Small Business Server.

Plan B's guaranteed disaster recovery service

Plan B is a specialist IT Disaster Recovery service provider based in the UK, that protects customers in the UK, Europe and the US using its unique virtualisation based system.

The Plan B Service is fully managed and will recover within minutes, fully working servers that can be used immediately, that needs virtually no IT support from the customer and that can be paid for on a simple monthly basis. Not only that, but it is a service that is guaranteed with money back penalties and has the added benefit of a local file backup that is tested every day.

The Service uses a dedicated appliance to take copies, or 'snapshots', of customers' critical systems and transfers them off-site to a secure recovery centre where they are automatically processed and converted to run on Plan B's virtual servers. Plan B test restore every system copy every day to make sure they will work when needed.



The service is very simple to set up and live with. Setting up the appliance takes no more than about 20 to 30 minutes and from this point on the service is completely automatic and should need no day to day IT support of any kind.

The appliance provides the added benefit of a local file backup, held on disk within the customers network. Not only is this fast and convenient but because Plan B test every system snapshot the customer can be completely confident that the backup is functioning and uncorrupted

How will Plan B protect your Small Business Server?

In the event of a disaster your Small Business Server would be protected with Plan B.

The Plan B Disaster Recovery service can recover a copy of your server and make it available to you across a secure connection over the Internet, ready to do work, in less than 30 minutes (usually a lot less). And not only will your server be working again, but it will be working in a network with your firewall settings and email redirection and DNS all switched and ready to go.

The only thing you have had to do to invoke your recovery is make a phone call.

So instead of being off the map for potentially many days, you will get access back to your Small Business Server virtually immediately. This will mean your email will still work and you will have access to all your normal business systems and data. So whatever disaster has befallen your business you will be in the very best position to handle it rather than just be subject to it.

The Plan B service is fully managed so you don't have to do anything on an on-going basis to protect your Small Business Server, so no add on IT costs, and you can invoke the service without any IT support at all. So

it is perfect for businesses with little or no internal or on-site IT staff. The verified local file backup is also an enormous benefit. It is fast and convenient and you will always know it's working. Again, ideal for businesses with little IT support and a high dependency on their backups.

And so you can be certain the service will work when you need it, Plan B **guarantees** your recovery. If in the event of a disaster, your Small Business Server is not recovered and provided back to you in twice the number of minutes it usually takes, then Plan B will pay you back all your fees for the last 12 months!

Benefits of Plan for Small Business Servers

The Plan B service is ideal for owners of Small Business Servers. It's guaranteed to recovery your system in minutes, but at the same time is simple, needs no in-house IT support and even has a tested local file backup feature.

The benefits of the Plan B Service are:

- 1) **Guaranteed Recovery** of your lost servers - or your money back
- 2) **Minimum down time** - Very fast recovery of systems within minutes - available from anywhere over the Internet
- 3) **Minimum business disruption** - Recovery of fully working systems, ready to do work
- 4) **Simple** to set up, fully automatic managed service
- 5) **Tested daily** for complete confidence
- 6) **No quibble immediate invocation**
- 7) **ISO 270001/2** Information Management Security accredited service
- 8) **Free trial** - 30 day working trial of your systems and data
- 9) **Low monthly service fees** - no capital expenditure
- 10) Independently assessed as '**Excellent**' by ZDNet

So, Plan B is the perfect disaster recovery solution for businesses that typically run Small Business Servers. It gives them a virtually immediate recovery of their server so they can quickly take charge of whatever situation they find themselves in, not only getting back into control but being seen by customers, staff and suppliers to be in control. It is also incredibly simple so it doesn't create any extra IT headaches or costs that are nothing to do with making the business more competitive. In fact its tested local backup can even help prevent data loss problems and banish the issue of backups that haven't worked.

For More information visit

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