

'Swine Flu' Means Test Transaction Document Recovery Plans Now

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The worldwide swine flu outbreak and the media attention surrounding it should not lead enterprises to panic. But they must take this opportunity to test their print and mail business continuity plans.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 27 April 2009, governments and public health authorities worldwide were preparing for the potential spread of AH1N1 influenza (swine flu). As of 27 April 2009, the World Health Organization had raised the alert level to 4 on its scale of 6. The outbreak is currently centered in Mexico, where AH1N1 influenza is believed to have caused more than 150 deaths, but the disease is known to have spread to the U.S., Canada, Europe and elsewhere.

Analysis

The swine flu outbreak is not yet a pandemic and may never become one. However, a true pandemic could cause absenteeism rates of 40% or higher for enterprises and their business partners and suppliers, resulting in severe operational disruptions. Businesses, governments and regulatory agencies should not make panic-driven moves in response to possibly overblown media reports on the swine flu. But business continuity management (BCM) and disaster recovery (DR) professionals and other stakeholders must take this opportunity to increase enterprise awareness of the potential business impact of a widespread outbreak of disease.

Transaction documents are the lifeblood of every enterprise. In their physical and electronic forms, they provide the cash flow needed to sustain operations. A missing, incomplete or outdated print and mail recovery plan could have potentially disastrous consequences for the enterprise, including the failure to produce mission-critical financial transaction documents (such as invoices and checks) or to issue regulated documents, thereby increasing the risk of incurring penalties for noncompliance.

Print and mail business interruption recovery needs differ from other IT continuity situations. The latter involve computing systems, applications, networks and telecommunications that are primarily digital. Print and mail relies not only on the upstream IT systems, but also on a labor-intensive and physical process that involves multiple external suppliers (such as paper companies, equipment providers and postal authorities). Yet, DR and BCM plans frequently fail to consider or completely cover an enterprise's critical printed customer communications.

Infrastructure and operations managers must formulate business interruption recovery strategies for the printed and electronic documents critical to their enterprises' operations. But a recent Gartner study found that only 25% of respondents have a BCM/DR plan in place, and that most of these plans do not cover all applications (see "User Survey Analysis: Production Print Management Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity"). Enterprises must recognize the urgent need to test their print and mail business continuity response plans. Swift recovery from an interruption to the production of critical communications is critical to an enterprise's continued operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Immediately initiate rigorous and well-documented testing to isolate and remediate problems in both internal and outsourced publishing operations.
- In addition to reviewing your print and mail operations, review your BCM/DR pandemic response plans.

- Make senior executives, line-of-business managers and other high-level decision-makers in your company aware of the importance of pandemic preparation, to ensure a broad, ongoing commitment to this effort.
- Monitor www.pandemicflu.gov and other government and public-health sources specific to your region to determine what actions are appropriate to ensure workforce safety and continued business operations.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "The 'Swine Flu' Is a Reason to Plan, Not Panic" — Do not overreact to the potential swine flu outbreak, but take this opportunity to review and test your pandemic response plans. **By Richard De Lotto and Roberta Witty**
- "Incorporate Print and Mail Into Your Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Planning" — Learn what is at stake, what to look for in a print and mail continuity services provider, and how to secure management support for this critically important IT function. **By Pete Basiliere**

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