Australia to become regional hub for disaster recovery


Christopher Ride

"Class A multi-subscriber services are the answer to reduced restoration times, and most importantly, less risk"

In a 2004 survey by InfoWorld, a staggering 46 percent of CIOs stated that ensuring data availability and recovery was the "number one priority" facing them at this time. As a result, there has been a surge in demand for business availability solutions. These solutions can all be found in Australia from companies such as IBM, HP and Interactive.

As such, the Managing Director of Interactive Pty Ltd, Christopher Ride, has made a prediction that Australia will become a major hub for IT disaster recovery (DR) services in the Asian region. He believes "there are clear indicators this will be the case. Australia has one of the most competitive DR markets in the world – with multiple specialised providers and excellent products. The cost and simplicity of international telecommunications has made these kinds of solutions viable, and Australia is the ideal location to protect and test your critical IT systems." He continues: "The time zones are compatible with the Asian region, the environmental and political landscape in Australia is stable, and the infrastructure and solutions already exist."

Interactive is one of the prominent DR providers in Australia, and they have just announced a partnership with Network Appliance to take real-time off-site data storage to the next level. Peer-to-peer data replication is finally a cost-effective and workable solution. Simon Green, Managing Director of Network Appliance in Australia states: "Network Appliance has the best data replication products in the world. We are proud to be associated with Interactive. Our joint aim is to ensure data availability, in all forms, with the highest levels of protection for our customers."

There have traditionally been four categories of DR coverage: dedicated services; multi-subscriber services; organisations who have written a plan but are yet to implement a solution; and those remaining organisations with no plan at all.

A fifth category has now developed thanks to the 'peer-to-peer' data technology from companies like Network Appliance – a blend between dedicated and multi-subscriber services. Peer-to-peer data replication enables the back-up disk systems to effectively 'mirror' the production systems without the need for processor input. This means that data subsystems (the most difficult and timely element to manage in the event of an outage) are always available. The customer owns the data storage system and the DR vendor provides the processing and infrastructure. This type of DR coverage has been termed as 'Class A multi-subscriber services' by Interactive. Figure 1, the DR services pyramid, shows how the Class

Figure 1: DR services pyramid

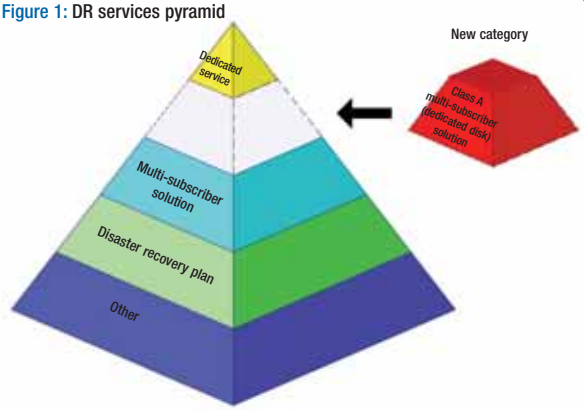
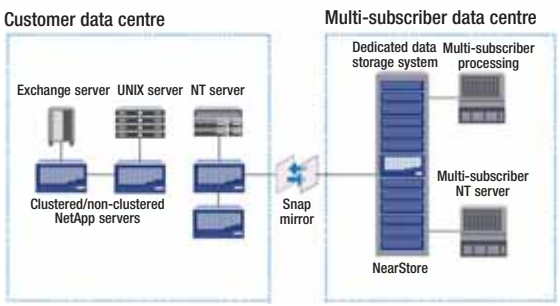


Figure 2: Class A multi-subscriber



A solution fits within current DR service offerings. Due to the data storage being available immediately, the restoration times are fast, the costs are a fraction of a fully dedicated solution, and it is simple and easy to manage. Figure 2 provides a pictorial representation of peer-to-peer data replication.

Mr Ride believes: "The costs of Class A services are higher than a standard multi-subscriber solution. But the benefits of the reduced restoration times are beneficial to those customers who need between 2-10 hour recovery windows. That would be almost impossible to guarantee under a standard multi-subscriber agreement. In my view, the more dedicated systems the customer has in place, the better." But Mr Ride sounded a warning to all multi-subscriber users. "The greatest risk to any DR multi-subscriber service is the very reason why the prices are competitive – it is a shared service. And there is a risk that when your organisation has a disaster, the multi-subscriber service will be unavailable because someone else has filed for a disaster before you. Quite frankly, I am alarmed by the lack of disclosure required to be given by DR providers in regard to conflicts between customers who are sharing common services. The vendor is assuming the risk profile for you, and yet the duty of care is currently on the client – and its board – not the vendor. Risks that need to be considered include the geographic proximity of other subscribers, common power grids and common telecommunications points. In my opinion, it is not acceptable that a multi-subscriber vendor can sell identical contracts in the same building without a duty of disclosure to the clients involved."

DATA AVAILABILITY AND RECOVERY: THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY

Interactive has a stringent policy on reducing risk between contracted multi-subscriber clients. "This is one of the reasons why the procurement of DR services from Australia (for the Asian region) is only a matter of time," says Mr Ride. "It is a matter of suppressing risk in the most cost-effective way. Customers today realise they want more than just a 'tick in the box' for disaster recovery protection. They want a solution that will actually work for them when they need it. Transparency of risk is critical in understanding your genuine position. Class A multi-subscriber services represent the best of both worlds."

There is more emphasis than ever before on the effects of natural disasters, terrorism and the fragile supply of critical services such as power and telecommunications. This is progressively on a collision course with the ever-increasing importance of IT infrastructure. We have all read the alarming statistics related to the tiny percentage of organisations that survive a disaster if solutions are not tested and in place, especially an IT-related disaster. Class A multi-subscriber services are the answer to reduced restoration times, and most importantly, less risk.

46 percent of CIOs are absolutely correct. ■