



White Paper

# Disaster Recovery in the Contact Center

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This white paper examines the challenges of implementing and managing a disaster recovery program in the contact center environment. It reviews direct and indirect impacts of different disasters as well as short and long term effects. It provides a series of practical steps that will help you prepare your contact center for potential disasters and minimize their impact on your operations. Finally, this paper discusses the technology and costs required to ensure business continuity, comparing deployment options for disaster recovery.

## Introduction

Disasters and hardware failures come without warning and can have a disastrous impact on your company's image and bottom line. Making matters worse, if you are running on a premise-based system, you simply do not have the flexibility and scalability needed to handle disaster recovery requirements, leaving you potentially offline for hours, days, or even weeks. The majority of contact centers are not prepared to ensure business continuity under emergency situations. Most disaster planning in contact centers is focused on recovery instead of continuance. Contact center executives need to understand the impact different disasters or emergencies can have on their operations and evaluate the solutions that are best suited to handle the ones deemed most likely for their locations.

## Impact on contact centers

There are many reasons your contact centers can be impacted by an emergency: storms, blizzards, earthquakes, fires, floods, epidemics and illnesses, traffic congestions, hardware and human failure. The resulting downtimes, busy signals, or excessive wait times have direct and indirect as well as immediate and long term impacts on your operations and financial health.

### Operational

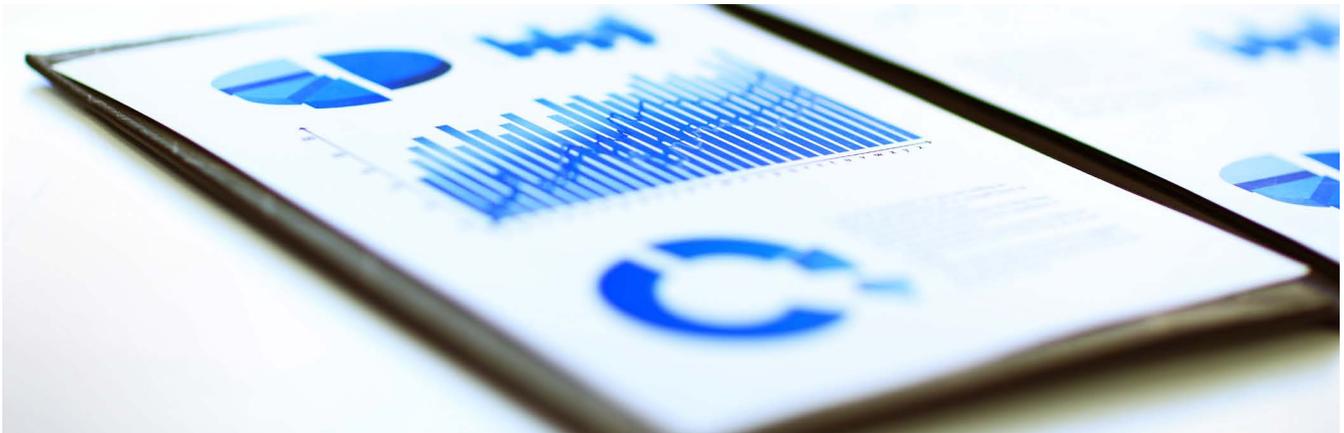
One uncertainty when it comes to natural disasters and planning for them is trying to estimate how long the impact will last. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) traditionally assumed that most basic services will be restored to most areas within 72 hours. That could mean that you are unable to take calls from your customers for three days. Non-redundant technology could mean an even longer downtime as you scramble to install new servers and software. Some of the consequences include:

- Customers are unable to reach you having a direct impact on operations as well as finance.
- Some emergencies can have an impact on your workforce preventing them to come to the office. This can mean that all of sudden, you have an insufficient number of agents to serve your customers.
- Many natural disasters can render your office space unusable for days, weeks, or even months. This means that you will have to find alternative space to move your agents to if your hardware can handle it.
- There could be an event that impacts many of your customers, increasing call volume beyond what your system can handle. The inability to handle all call in a timely manner only makes the customer experience worse.
- Your technology may also be used to provide support for your internal customers, like helpdesk. A disaster will remove this support to other parts of the business meaning that not only your contact center is affected but other parts of the business as well.
- Emergencies are not easy to recover from no matter if they are large or small. This has a direct impact on operations: technology and office spaces may be unusable for days or weeks and employee turnover may have increased because of the disaster.

## Financial

While some of the losses from disasters are covered by insurance, like property damage, other losses, such as lost sales, collections, and decreased customer satisfaction or a damaged brand cannot be easily recovered from.

- A damaged brand has a staggering effect on a company's finances by directly affecting consumer confidence and revenues.
- Customers that cannot reach you will not be customers for long. Lost customers do not only have an immediate impact on finances. Winning new customers to make up for lost ones is expensive and time consuming.
- Unsatisfied customers spend less with your company and also tell more people about their bad experiences which indirectly impact your revenue numbers.
- Disasters most likely mean you need to spend money on recovery activities like purchasing new hardware, office spaces, hiring new agents, and employee time spent in recovery efforts.
- Disasters also have a direct effect on employees. They may have to quit because circumstances such as injuries because they were forced to relocated or have no means of transportation may not allow them to come to work. Increased attrition is a costly consequence.



## Preparedness

Disaster recovery and business continuity plans need to be a critical part of every contact center. Designing such a plan takes time and effort and is only one small part of the process to make it successful. The more difficult part is implementing and executing on the plan to ensure that everyone in the contact center knows their responsibilities in case of an emergency.

Different disasters may need a different response or plan. For example, when your hardware fails, your back-up solution kicks in and handles the calls, when a large storm is coming you may move your agents to a safe location and re-route calls there, or when there is a flood that makes your office unusable, you can route calls to your agents at their homes.

When designing the plan, technology may limit on how you can respond to each emergency. Be sure to consider the capabilities and limits of your technology as well as carriers. Once the plan is done, it is a matter of training, testing, and preparing.

Disaster recovery and business continuity plans are only successful if the technology used to route and handle calls is available after the emergency occurs.

### Best practices

- Assign dedicated disaster recovery resource – preferably a team instead of just one person.
- Train agents and supervisors on disaster recovery processes and systems as part of the on-boarding process and provide frequent (quarterly) refreshers.
- Provide written instructions of disaster recovery procedures.
- Fully test your internal disaster recovery plan 1 – 2 times per year (evacuation, meeting places, communication, etc.).
- Undertake a quarterly readiness test (log-ins, is everyone trained, are there printed instructions, etc.).

## Technology solutions

A well thought out business continuity plan considers three main areas: processes, people, and technology. Unfortunately, implemented technology can severely limit the business system issues continuity plans in many contact centers as there is lacking functionality and flexibility.

### Premise vs. Hosted

In a traditional, premise-based environment, the only option for contact centers is to incur the cost of deploying a duplicate premise-based system. However, even after this considerable investment, there is still no guarantee that the duplicate system is available to agents in the event of an emergency. Further, the investment would increase even more if the contact center wants to achieve geographic redundancy.

Premise-based solutions are also limited in flexibility and on-demand scalability, both are necessary to solve business continuity in many circumstances. Hosted solutions, on the other hand, are independent of geography so agents, supervisors, and administrators are able to access them from anywhere with a phone and internet connection. This makes them a great disaster recovery / business continuity solution. Most subscription-based hosted contact center solutions can be deployed as a primary solution or as a supplemental or back-up to an existing premise-based implementation by re-directing your inbound 800 numbers and the hosted solution takes calls immediately following a critical service outage using the same experienced agents.

There are many levels of execution by hosted vendors. The below are a few of the criteria to consider for when choosing a hosted disaster recovery solution:

- **Geographic redundancy** – this ensures that even if one hosting site goes down, all functionality switches over to the second site.
- **99.99% uptime guarantee** – redundancy is great but useless if the system is not available when you need it.
- **Flexible connectivity options** – this ensures that you get calls to agents even if some options are failing.
- **Flexible call routing** – guarantees that you can make quick changes to call routing rules depending on the situation.
- **Scalability** – make sure that your provider can scale you up immediately should you need to add more capacity.
- **24/7/365 Network Monitoring** – guarantees that the vendor is pro-active about arising problems and solves them quickly.
- **24/7/365 Support** – ensure the vendor is there to give you the support in case of an emergency no matter what time of day.
- **System Health Checks** – make certain that the vendor is able to provide you with testing services for the hosted solution.

## Best practices

- Get monthly system health checks customized to your solution to ensure everything works as specified.
- Published emergency number that always points to the disaster recovery solution in case number cannot be forwarded or take a long time to be forwarded.
- Provide printed quick guides for the disaster recovery solution to agents, supervisors, and administrators.
- Assign more than one person in IT to handle administration and switch to disaster recovery system.
- Work with carriers to know lead times of forwarding or re-pointing phone numbers.
- Provide detailed written instructions on how to point phone numbers to disaster recovery solution and test.

## Cost

Duplicating a premise-based installation and even trying to deploy it in geographically dispersed locations can run in the millions. Yet, it might still fail or not meet situational needs in case of a disaster. Premise-based disaster recovery solutions will require additional servers, installation, maintenance, and in-house support making it an expensive option.

Hosted solutions have gained in way of functionality to be on par with premise solutions but are quicker and cheaper to implement, maintain, and a monthly subscription model does not break the bank with reduced capital expenditures. In most cases the high availability and business continuity capabilities of hosted solutions pays back the investment after the first disaster or emergency event. Some hosted vendors also provide special disaster recovery pricing that makes the total cost of ownership much lower than comparable premise-based installations. A 300 seat call center can save over \$1,000,000 the first year with a hosted instead of a premise-based implementation, plus you get higher availability, increased flexibility, and a true business continuity solution.

## Conclusion

There are many options and vendors that provide a disaster recovery / business continuity solution. However, each provider has a different approach to disaster recovery. It's important that call center executives fully understand the potential risks, capabilities, financial impacts and how they are addressed before selecting a provider. Executives need to be completely confident that their contact center is ready for disasters and the largest part of this readiness is the technology.

Hosted call center solutions offer enormous benefits over on-premise solutions, including scalability on demand, flexibility to access from any location, lower IT administration overhead, and reduced capital expenditure (CAPEX). The benefits of a hosted call center when it comes to business continuity are too great to ignore and successful call center executives are the ones who thoroughly research potential providers until finding the provider that offers business continuity measures above and beyond the call center's needs.

## About RingCentral

Since 2003, **RingCentral** has been breaking down the communication barriers created by complex on-premise hardware. RingCentral's cloud phone system delivers business communications solutions that free people to work the way they want in today's mobile, distributed and always-on work world. Delivered on a state-of-the-art cloud infrastructure, RingCentral helps more than 300,000 customers thrive in a new world of work. [Learn why.](#)

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visit <http://www.ringcentral.com> or call 855-774-2510.**