

# BC: THE CHANNEL OPPORTUNITIES

*Hardly a week goes by without a disruptive event, manmade or natural, taking place in one part of the country or another. Floods, fires, oil refinery explosions, terrorist threats and plain old bad weather seem to be interrupting daily life with increasing regularity, forcing organisations of every kind to look at their Business Continuity (BC) strategies – or lack thereof – with more urgency than ever before, writes Piers Ford.*

That urgency is also being underlined by a combination of legislation and the advent of BS25999, the new BC management standard. While BS25999 contains some references to guarding against IT failure in terms of risk management, there is also the promise of an IT-specific service continuity standard to come.

So while the climate is adverse in so many other respects, it is certainly right for IT vendors and resellers to develop product and service portfolios that address customer demand for more streamlined and economical BC services.

“Organisations today, large and small, public or private, are being driven towards new cultures of heightened levels of governance, resilience, security and operational agility,” says Steve Beck, BC and information security consultant at

Hitachi Data Systems.

“They are being driven by old and new regulation and the compliance pressures, together with a greater need to compete in a very dynamic global marketplace.”

The traditional and expensive approach – building duplicate, redundant data centres, for example, or whacking up storage capacity – has restricted investment in BC infrastructure to the enterprise sector. And many organisations are now finding that backing up primary data as part of their usual BC processes has become an unwieldy overhead, as disruptive in its own way as any external intervention.

A recent BridgeHead Software survey of almost 500 UK and US IT executives revealed that 37 per cent are experiencing daily backups that take more than nine hours, and 59 per cent feel that the volume of data they

are required to backup does, or is likely to, disrupt business operations. More than half of the respondents lament that up to 50 per cent of the data on their primary disk is unlikely to be accessed ever again, suggesting that poor use of resources is a common side effect of many BC strategies.

But new technologies and approaches are bringing down costs and opening up the options, for SMEs as well as larger organisations, creating a major opportunity for the channel: according to IDC, the global data protection and recovery management market alone is growing by almost 17 per cent each year and will be worth \$200 million by 2011.

“It makes sense for the channel to identify and address any market which is experiencing significant growth,” says Ian Masters, UK sales director at Double-Take Software. He adds that the BC, disaster recovery and data replication markets show every sign of continuing their explosive growth.

“Making the right choice of continuity technology allows the channel to gain significant competitive advantage and by leveraging the value added capabilities of their chosen solutions they can increase their overall revenue and margins. Whether they embed the technology into their own or resell solutions as part of a larger disaster recovery implementation, their choice of technology is the make or break in winning against the competition.”

At Hitachi, Beck points out that many customers are now looking to develop a holistic BC practice and capability that will embrace the technologies that add resilience, security and agility to their operations.

“To support this there has been a rush of new technologies within the data storage space, technologies that are being positioned to make the best use of resources and avoid operational interruptions, planned or otherwise,” he says.

These technologies – storage rationalisation, IP-connected storage, more sophisticated data encryption and data de-duplication – are all starting to have a profound effect on the market. But one technology – server and storage virtualisation – is



forging ahead as vendors develop affordable solutions that promise the vital, high availability levels that are the required result of server consolidation.

"Virtualisation technology has led to more efficient and agile use of IT resources at server, network and data storage levels, which in turn has led to lower power consumptions, reduced risks and increased cost savings," says Beck. "Storage resource 'thin provisioning' is playing a more important role here, especially where it can be deployed across a consolidated, virtualised storage state."

"Storage virtualisation is adding new options about how and where information is replicated," agrees Timothy Coats, practice lead BC consulting at EMC. "The ability to replicate at the block level but independently of the storage vendor means a great amount of flexibility in the infrastructure.

"And server virtualisation is changing how computer resource can be deployed. By abstracting from the hardware layer, it will soon become possible to move applications – even while running – to different locations. Just as with storage, this provides much greater flexibility in addition to reduced energy requirements."

According to IDC, the server virtualisation market will be worth \$3.1 billion by 2010, alongside an availability market worth \$2.1 billion. And the analyst predicts that 50 per cent of data centres will have implemented availability solutions in their virtualised environments.

Nick Turnbull, director of sales, EMEA and Asia Pacific at Marathon Technologies, says that BC will be a major driver behind this growth.

"And that's where the opportunity is for the channel. With solutions like v-Available [Marathon's XenSource-compliant bridging initiative between availability and virtualisation], they can adopt virtualisation quicker and with more confidence," he says. "Customers are talking about critical data and applications. The reseller has scope for a lot of value-add in consultancy, planning, installation and support."

Like other virtualisation and availability players including VMware



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and Avanquest Solutions, marathon is actively recruiting resellers to suit the wider scope of a market that is now embracing the SME sector.

"Historically, our typical partner profile has been selling mid-tier enterprise servers – HP and IBM – and been highly certified and qualified to sell infrastructure on that level," says Turnbull. "More recently, we're finding that Citrix specialists [Citrix bought XenSource in October] are looking for additional products and add-ons to sell around a XenServer core that they can make into a unique solution."

VMware channel director for northern Europe, Matt Piercy, says he's also noticed increased interest in the SME heartlands, and suggests that green issues are also driving BC investment as organisations look for less carbon-heavy alternatives to their power-greedy data centres.

"It isn't environmentally friendly to have a data centre sitting dormant somewhere," he says. "So a lot of our customers deploying VMware will migrate their existing hardware to the recovery site and use our software to enable their BC solution. This was previously the domain of the enterprise but now it's possible to have a genuine BC solution with minimal hardware outlay. We were focused on the enterprise 12 months ago but in the last year, we've made a concerted push into the SME space. Frankly, these organisations consider their data centres to be as impressive and complex and their enterprise

counterparts these days."

VMware's recruitment drive has been particularly successful at a local level, Piercy explains. "As I travel around the UK, I see specialist resellers who are unique to their area, like retail outlets providing bespoke PC services to a handful of local clients. It would previously have been cost-prohibitive for them to get involved in virtualisation. But we're recruiting them quite successfully. Virtualisation takes a considerable amount of services to do an initial deployment, and that's where they can make their money."

Tim Muckart, product manager at AvanQuest, says he's also noticed an increase in the number of resellers approaching him, prompted by customer demand for continuous availability as a means of preventing disruption to enterprise applications.

"Something like Blackberry Enterprise is probably the most continuously available system on the network," he says. "So if you're the reseller who's sold it in, there's an opportunity to offer an alternative to clustering with its high administrative overhead: an availability system like Neverfail which will cover a host of other applications much more simply. It's an add-on sale to an existing customer – they're always the best customers to sell to – and it expands their own knowledge."

Neverfail's vice president of channel and sales development, Nick Harmer, agrees that business's increasing round-the-clock reliance on applications like Blackberry will drive customers to seek out resellers who can demonstrate their ability to protect availability. Resellers in turn will look to vendors to help them plug their own skills gap as they navigate this new territory.

"Due to the current IT skills shortage in the channel, it is critical for vendors to be able to work with resellers and offer advanced e-learning programmes to ensure appropriate and convenient education in products," he says. "Vendors will also need to work together with partners to plan how BC solutions and services can be deployed in order to achieve the highest profits possible while also providing their customer with a flexible and scalable solution."