

When The Walls Come Tumbling Down.



Don MacVittie, 2011-29-09

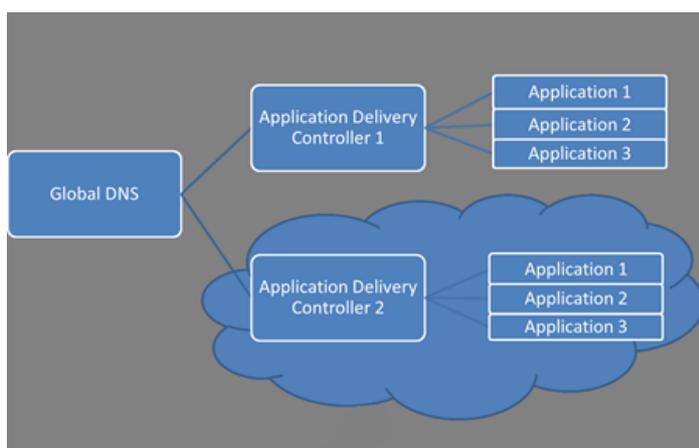
When horrid disasters strike and both people and corporations are put on notice that they suddenly have a lot more important things to do, will you be ready? It is a testament to man's optimism that with very few exceptions we really don't, not at the personal level, not at the corporate level. I've worked a lot of places, and none of them had a complete, ready to rock DR plan. The insurance company I worked at was the closest – they had an entire duplicate datacenter sitting dark in a location very remote from HQ, awaiting need. Every few years they would refresh it to make certain that the standby DC had the correct equipment to take over, but they counted on relocating staff from what would be a ravaged area in the event of a catastrophe, and were going to restore thousands of systems from backups before the remote DC could start running. At the time it was a good plan. Today it sounds quaint. And it wasn't that long ago.

There are also a lot of you who have yet to launch a cloud initiative of any kind. This is not from lack of interest, but more because you have important things to do that are taking up your time. Most organizations are dragging their feet replacing people, and few – according to a recent survey, very few – are looking to add headcount (proud plug that F5 is – check out our [careers page](#) if you're looking). It's tough to run off and try new things when you can barely keep up with the day-to-day workloads. Some organizations are lucky enough to have R&D time set aside. I've worked at a couple of those too, and honestly, they're better about making use of technology than those who do not have such policies. Though we could debate if they're better because they take the time, or take the time because they're better.

And the combination of these two items brings us to a possible pilot project. You want to be able to keep your organization online or be able to bring it back online quickly in the event of an emergency. Technology is making it easier and easier to complete this arrangement without investing in an entire datacenter and constantly refreshing the hardware to have quick recovery times.

Global DNS in various forms is available to redirect users from the disabled datacenter to a datacenter that is still capable of handling the load, if you don't have multiple datacenters, then it can redirect elsewhere – like to virtual servers running in the cloud. ADCs are starting to be able to work similarly whether they are cloud deployed or DC deployed, that leaves keeping a copy of your necessary data and applications in the cloud, and cloud storage with a cloud storage gateway such as the Cloud Extender functionality in our [ARX](#) product allow for this to be done with a minimum of muss and fuss.

These technologies, used together, yield a DR architecture that looks something like this:



Notice that the cloud extender isn't listed here, because it is useful for getting the data copied, but would most likely reside in your damaged datacenter. Assuming that the cloud provider was one like our partner [Rackspace](#), who does both cloud VMs and cloud storage, this architecture is completely viable.

You'll still have to work some things out, like guaranteeing that security in the cloud is acceptable, but we're talking about an emergency DR architecture here, not a long-running solution, so app-level security and functionality to block malicious attacks at the ADC layer will cover most of what you need. AND it's a cloud project. The cost is far, far lower than a full blown DR project, and you'll be prepared in case you need it.

This buys you time to ingest the fact that your datacenter has been wiped out. I've lived through it, there is so much that must be done immediately – finding a new location, dealing with insurance, digging up purchase documentation, recovering what can be recovered... Having a plan like this one in place is worth your while. Seriously. It's a strangely emotional time, and having a plan is a huge help in keeping people focused.

Simply put, disasters come, often without warning – mine was a flood caused by a broken pipe. We found out when our monitoring equipment fried from being soaked and sent out a raft of bogus messages. The monitoring equipment was six feet above the floor at the time. You can't plan for everything, but to steal and twist a famous phrase, "he who plans for nothing protects nothing."

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