

A Question of Distance and Apples

By Mr. Tyler

As consideration is given to the process of recovery from various disasters, many corporate, government and institutional managers have developed, or copied from others, various storage site evaluation and comparison criteria.

Armed with a supposedly suitable checklist, they proceed to compare multiple record storage and information management service vendors in order to locate a suitable site for their own critical disaster recovery information.

The point often missed about this process is that sometimes highly technical, often lengthy surveys of potential vendors can easily provide false comparisons leading to questionable, even bad decisions about such service providers! At the very least, a false comparison may lead to excessive expense or, worse yet, may not provide a critically needed disaster recovery at any price.

To illustrate the problem, let's consider a supposedly valid question asked on virtually any comparison checklist of record storage centers. It is the matter about distance between data center and storage center.

Distance between you and your off-site disaster recovery records facility seems like an easy question for vendor comparison purposes.

You are here and they are there. If you have more distance between your site and the storage site of critical recovery records, you should have more peace of mind. Well, the fact of the matter is that more distance is not automatically a better situation in terms of disaster recovery.

Consider for a moment the well known fire a few years ago that destroyed the Northwest Bank in downtown Minneapolis. Not only ruined were the bank premises, but the offices and records of building tenants located in the building several floors above the bank were destroyed or damaged. Although the fire raged hot and for many hours, not destroyed were the stored records and other content of the bank's vaults.

The records and valuables of companies located across the street, the town or the country from this vault survived because they were secure within the vault at the time of the disaster. This was due simply to the nature and construction of the vault.

Distance had absolutely nothing to do with record survival! However, if that vault had not been of sufficiently secure or rated construction, its contents could have easily perished.

In this and like examples, the selection of an arbitrary distance, be it one block or one mile, from an off-site storage facility simply has no validity for comparison purposes. A better comparison will deal on a heavily weighted basis more with the construction quality and fire ratings of off-site facilities than with the distance from the data center to the storage center.

Clearly, a high quality off-site record facility located half way around the world might be preferred to one of equal quality located across the street if convenience of access or cost of service is of little importance.

There are no rules or regulations that legitimately deal with this question of distance because there is no way to identify with certainty what distance is appropriate, only the checklist author's guess about the matter.

To argue for any particular distance standard ignores the fact that tornadoes, fires and floods can leave untouched buildings located on either side of flattened, burned or flooded structures.

There are many factors to consider when evaluating competing disaster recovery and off-site record storage management vendors. The single most important consideration is to be certain of the relevance of your evaluation criteria!

Think critically and question all of the assumptions you are making, not just the distance from your site.

Consider very carefully the actual nature of that which must be protected and retrieved in order to survive a disaster. Most of all, don't confuse apples and oranges.

You may come to the conclusion that it is critical to deal with a disaster recovery vendor located a certain minimum distance from your site.

If you do make such a determination, be careful not to pass up a superior vendor located along the way, even if they happen to be right next door.

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