



Volume 4
Issue 10

Availability Digest

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October 2009

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In this issue:

Case Studies

[Handelsbanken Turns To Parallel Sysplex
Never Again](#)

[Google Troubles - A Cloud Case Study](#)

Availability Topics

[Spamalytics](#)

Recommended Reading

[Pandemic Response Planning](#)

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Is Your Company Ready for the Flu Pandemic?

The flu season is upon us, and this year's predominant flu strain threatens havoc. Some estimates place infection rates from the H1N1 swine flu virus as high as 40%, and some of those infected will work for your company. Sick personnel will stay home. Others will take time off to care for infected family members or for children whose schools have been closed.

What if over a period of several months, up to half of your staff is absent at any time? How will that impact your business, and what plans have you made to continue operations in the face of this potential availability crisis?

This month's article "Pandemic Response Planning" reviews a free guide being used by organizations to consider their business continuity responses to the H1N1 pandemic. A decade ago, companies faced a similar challenge, not with a human illness but with a computer illness. Everyone in 1999 was making contingencies to keep operating in the face of Y2K. Fortunately, the doomsday forecast did not come true; but solid plans were in place just in case. Don't get caught this flu season without an equally good continuity plan to keep the company doors open when staff absences increase.

Dr. Bill Highleyman, Managing Editor

Case Studies

Handelsbanken Turns to Parallel Sysplex

Founded in 1871, Svenska Handelsbanken survived two world wars and multiple recessions to become one of the largest banks in the Nordic countries.

Handelsbanken has recently satisfied its requirement for continuous availability and scalability of its mission-critical credit-card and online banking services with a two-node, active/active, geographically-dispersed IBM Parallel Sysplex system using z10 EC mainframe processors. Transactions are distributed between the nodes to balance load. If a processor, database system, or even a data center should fail, all transactions will be immediately shifted to the surviving entity within seconds so that customer services suffer no interruption.

Equally important, planned downtime is eliminated since the transaction load can be routed totally to one node, allowing the other node to be upgraded.

Furthermore, Handelsbanken's scalability requirement is met because of the massive scalability of the z10 EC systems. Should an increase in capacity be temporarily needed to support single-node operation, either due to a failure or to upgrade a site, one or more spare CPUs in the operational processor can be put into service using IBM's capacity-on-demand service.

[--more--](#)

Never Again

Google Troubles – A Case Study in Cloud Computing

It's tough when you're the big guy on the block like Google. Its cloud services are so broad and so popular that it is bound to stumble once in a while. When it does, it seems to be the target of a feeding frenzy in the press.

Today, by and large, the cloud is useful for applications that are not mission-critical. If your application simply cannot be down, it doesn't belong in the cloud. But as seen by the commercial success of cloud providers, a myriad of applications benefit from cloud computing.

However, if you want to put a critical application in the hands of the cloud, there is little that you can do when a problem occurs but wait for the problem to be solved. You need a contingency plan for such an event. Perhaps you can have your applications ready to go in another cloud. Perhaps your application data can be replicated from your primary cloud to your backup cloud. Whatever your contingency plan is, you must have one.

No matter how reliable a service is, the question is not will it fail? The question is when will it fail?

[--more--](#)

Availability Topics

Spamalytics

Masses of spam can bring your email service to its knees. But how effective are spam filters? To answer this question, a team of computer scientists reasoned that the best way to measure spam is to be a spammer.

The team orchestrated a parasitic infiltration of an existing spam botnet's infrastructure and caused the botnet to modify some of the spam it was sending so as to redirect the spam to "defanged" web sites under the team's control. Using this capability, the team measured conversion rates of its modified spam campaigns. Conversion rate is the probability that a spam email will result in the purchase of a product or in the infection of a browser.

The team concluded from these experiments that the profit margin for spam may be meager enough that spammers must be sensitive to the details of how their campaigns are run. If we can improve spam defenses faster than the spammers can react, they might dry up and go away. This requires that anti-spam defenses must be continually improved (which they are) and that everyone must use good spam-filtering tools (which they do not).

[--more--](#)

Recommended Reading

Pandemic Response Planning for Businesses

Beware the flu season! This year, it's bringing with it a particularly nasty strain - the H1N1 swine flu. With widespread vaccinations planned, perhaps the threat will be minimal. Or instead, it may sicken so many people that a large part of your workforce will be absent for days.

If your company suddenly lost up to 50% of its staff for an extended period, how would the business survive? The cost of reduced productivity, lost customers, and diminished employee morale could be devastating. What's needed in advance is a proper contingency plan that will allow the company to avoid flu symptoms even if its employees do not.

To guide you through this complex planning process, eBRP Solutions, a company focused on business continuity management tools, is offering a complimentary guide to pandemic response planning. We review eBRP's guide in this article; and as you will see by the guide's detail, pandemic response planning is no simple exercise.

We're all keeping our fingers crossed that the swine flu will turn into a non-event. But let's not bet our companies on it.

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