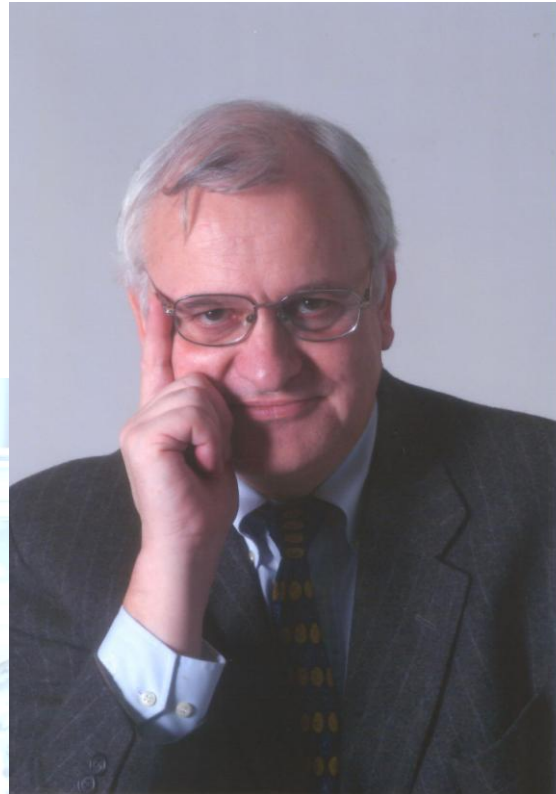


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ITMatters

In this regular column Charles Zealey of ITSolve covers all aspects of business and personal computing. If you have a question about IT matters, email it to Charles at itmatters@itsolve.co.uk



STOP FOR JUST A MOMENT

Here's a question you should ask yourself. Just how dependent are you on computer systems? Even if you have somehow managed thus far without them, your bank has one or two. So does the shop at which you buy your food. The country's fuel distribution system depends on them. So does the electricity grid. And water distribution employ a few. And so on. Our everyday lives depend increasingly on computer systems.

And businesses are now so dependent on them that many would not be able to function, let alone service their customers' needs, in the event of a serious failure. It is sometimes sobering to stop and think, even if only for a moment, about the consequences of a failure of a critical system.

OR WILL A MOMENT STOP YOUR BUSINESS

Given the consequences of that moment when something critical fails, it is surely worth devoting some time to consider ways of reducing the risk? Yet too few of us do. Here are my main tips. Start by listing all the systems and processes in the business and rate them by the impact of their failure. Consider as many eventualities as you can, from 'simple' machine failure through to physical damage, flood, power failure – perhaps one covering a wide area – and so on. Think about how you might respond, and perhaps more importantly, consider how taking action now might make recovery easier.

A PLAN WOULD BE GOOD

It would be good to talk to your IT Supplier about ways in which they can help you. You should consider holding spare parts, or spare machines to put into operation. Consider

spreading spares and even complete systems across locations. Consider duplicating communications links, perhaps using different suppliers in order to reduce risk.

A good disaster recovery plan will define the steps to be taken and will give a view of the priority of the various actions needed. As with any plan, it may prove necessary to vary these in the event of a disaster, but at least you will have thought through many of the issues beforehand.

Finally, test your plan. Focus on the more critical areas, but if your plan calls for a server to be rebuilt in four hours you need to know that you can achieve it.

This is another area where there is nothing like actually making a start. I doubt you will cover every eventuality but, if you let it, your plan can develop over time. The better prepared you are now, the easier it will be when and if that moment of failure comes. Perhaps it will never happen. But don't plan on it.

Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/. For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email lisa@itsolve.co.uk.

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