



How to Run More Effective IT DR Drills



The Need for IT DR

IT DR plans are an integral part of the modern business landscape. With more and more business processes being digitized, organizations are now heavily relying on applications and databases staying up. When an application or database goes down, focus immediately shifts right to getting it back up.

Before this happens, an organization (or an IT team specifically) needs to find the best strategy for re-establishing service. They take these strategies, work them into disaster recovery plans, and practice those plans until they're ready for an honest outage.

Practice empowers recovery teams and helps them reduce downtime during true events. But drawing on the time and energy of multiple subject matter experts (SMEs) to pre-plan and execute drills hinders their day-to-day activities, and this hurts drills in the long run. If SMEs don't give a drill their full attention, it prevents drills from reaching peak effectiveness and keeps recovery teams from being as prepared as they can be.

Minimizing Downtime

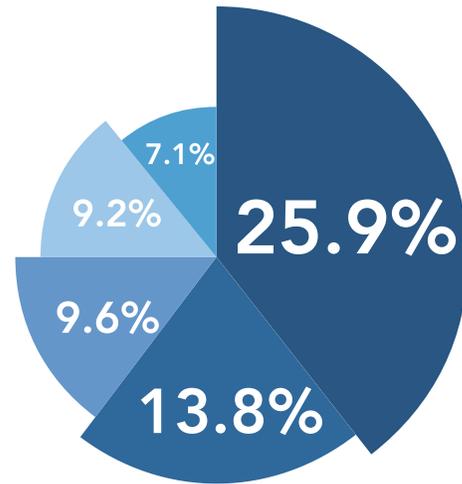
Outages are inevitable. And for almost every organization, they're very costly. But the high costs of downtime aren't unavoidable. Downtime—by its nature and its consequences—is expensive, but having reductions in downtime are where a lot of organizations can salvage some cash.

But how can a team close this downtime gap and improve their RTO? The formula has a few different pieces, with the biggest and most important being regular exercises.

In 2016, outages
cost a minimum of
\$926 per
minute

Source: <https://blog.storagecraft.com/business-continuity-statistics-tech/>

2016 Stats



- 25.9% of companies saw an impact on the business from the time used for recovery efforts
- 13.8% of companies saw money outside of the budget spent on recovery efforts
- 9.6% of companies saw damage to their brand reputations
- 9.2% of companies experienced disruptions that affected revenue
- 7.1% of organizations suffered permanent losses

Source: <https://blog.storagecraft.com/business-continuity-statistics-tech/>

Why? Because regular exercises deliver invaluable returns.

First, regular exercises give the team practice for a catalog of likely scenarios. There's no telling exactly what will cause an outage when it happens, but running each of these exercise scenarios gives team members the practice they need, and grants them familiarity with the procedure. Ultimately, they'll progress through an event and restore service faster.

An added benefit to your plans will come from running drills with your team. Streamlining plans is just as much as an imperative as running drills, and by engaging your team with plans before an actual event, you can spot those plan's flaws. And when you expose those flaws, you can refine your plans with new strategies.

Creating Plans and Designing Drills

To create disaster recovery plans, you need to gather information. A manual process for this is strenuous and difficult. SMEs might not provide the entire picture if they're distracted from their daily docket of responsibilities. If a plan doesn't incorporate this information, it won't be effective, and it will hurt an organization more in downtime costs.

But if plans are full-scope and all the pivotal information is drawn from the SMEs and worked in, drills still have to be run using those plans.

Task management and assignment, along with tracking task completion, comprise the bulk of IT DR drills. Depending on your organization, your team may be maintaining any number of applications and databases. And with any given drill your team runs, a lot of tasks that need management, assignment, and tracking will be generated.

Spreadsheets have become a gold standard in data management. Using these tools for IT DR drills, however, is not as effective as it may seem. While a lot of data is generated with each drill, and spreadsheet looks like the perfect house for the data, spreadsheets aren't dynamic. An IT DR drill is a moving process, and for

task management, assignment, and tracking in during an IT DR drill, a flexible and robust tool is a must.

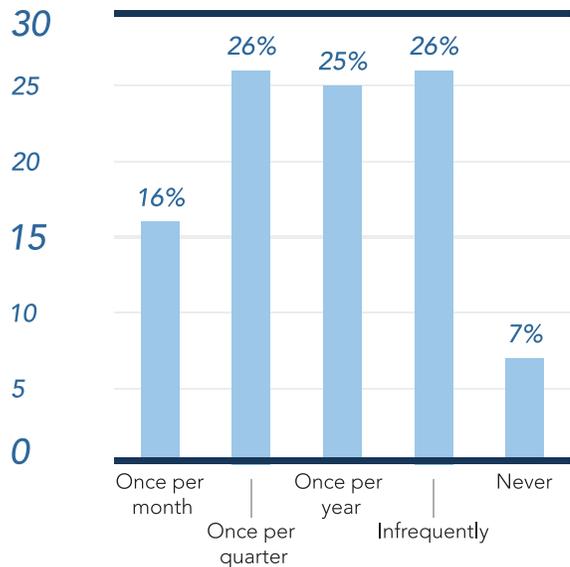
By using a spreadsheet to run an IT DR drill, more time is used. And while drills are beneficial, every team member involved still needs time for other duties. Allowing drills to consume more time than they necessarily should ultimately hurts the team.

Plan maintenance is tedious through a spreadsheet as well. However the responsibility is divided for plan maintenance, combing through the document to impose revisions isn't how most need to spend their time. Again, spreadsheets, just by their functionality, aren't optimized for maintaining plans and running drills.

Running Drills

Statically, teams drill with regular frequency. Many stick to the industry best practice of once a quarter, at minimum. However, some teams neglect to drill, failing to do so more than once a year.

There's a reason for drilling as little as once a year, and it's something we've



How Often IT Professionals Said Their Organizations Run Drills

Source: CloudVelox "State of Disaster Recovery Survey," 2016

touched on already: drills take time away from other duties. Spreadsheets, email, and other standard communication channels drag drills along. It's the lack of centralization all these different tools force onto teams that prevent them from having comprehensive, tight, and meaningful drills.

Manual work is what throttles the flow of an IT DR drill. With each step,

participants have to complete and record their tasks, or at least communicate with a committed recordkeeper. Jolting between responsibilities is disruptive for team members, and it keeps the stopwatch ticking.

Veoci for IT DR

It's possible to sidestep the common hurdles of testing IT DR plans. Most of the gripes, and the driving factors behind minimal testing of IT DR plans, can easily be solved with the right solution.

This boils down mostly to automating a lot of the manual work we mentioned already. When you introduce automation to IT DR testing, another set of benefits reveals itself. Plans can be living tools for your team, but it demands a jump from spreadsheets and documents to a platform.

This is the Veoci difference. Veoci allows IT DR teams to easily create plans, maintain them, and operationalize them. There's much more than plan management and creation with Veoci, however.

Tasks and Workflows are essential pieces of drills. This process is at the core of Veoci as a platform; plans only serve as a frame for the operations Veoci is used

to facilitate, including IT DR exercises and outage responses. Tasks and Workflows keep the operation moving, escalating the sequential steps to the appropriate owners seamlessly.

Planning and Launching Drills with Veoci

A core piece of the automation in these drills is how much Veoci enables drill masters to accomplish pre-planning activities. Once a plan—or, in most cases, multiple plans for different applications—is launched, administrators can immediately send Workflows to application owners to begin the data-gathering process. The owners escalate to SMEs, the SMEs get the mission critical data, and then the team is ready to begin completing tasks and recording the drill.

With automation, pre-planning becomes a simple process. Once application plans are selected, launched, and assigned owners, Workflows escalate the data-gathering to the appropriate SMEs. And if SMEs need reminders and escalations to complete their duties, drill planners can work those in with point-and-click configurability.

Dashboards play an important role at this stage too. Tiles in Dashboards display how many application Workflows are currently sitting in certain steps. This

functionality is useful to drill planners for a few principle reasons. First, it gives them a broad view of the drill's status; second, it reveals who needs to be targeted to complete their steps; third, it gives members outside of the team—namely executives—a view of the drill's progress.

Establishing Drills in Veoci

Plans are a manifestation of the set of motions your team goes through during a crisis.

Veoci plans execute on the same principle paper plans always have: to guide a team through crisis and recovery. Veoci adds another dimension paper, documents, and spreadsheets can't: escalation. A plan, when launched in Veoci, progresses with the team and the event, maintaining situational awareness and informing decision-making.

Veoci still creates this dynamic even during drills.

Once pre-planning is settled and all critical data is gathered, the drill begins and the recovery tasks are fired off to the appropriate personnel through the use of roles in Veoci. But like the pre-planning stage, Workflows and Tasks take center

stage again, powering team members through the response and recovery.

For larger teams with multi-day drills, the Task and Workflow assignment functionality allows team members to connect when they're available and start immediately on their responsibilities. And, either in Veoci, by email, or even by SMS text messages, participants can mark the completion of a step and push the application recovery along.

Team members can also do this from anywhere, as Veoci is cloud-hosted. This core functionality also lends another surprising and welcome benefit to the drilling process: more realistic drills. Individual applications, or an entire network, can be taken down to mimic true downtime when accompanied by a cloud-hosted platform. And since the drill is managed through a cloud-hosted platform, the drill still runs smoothly.

This side, the drill itself, looks very similar to its counterpart in pre-planning. Dashboards are prevalent here again as well. All the benefits Dashboards provide in the pre-planning process easily translate to the live drill. And, unless configured not to do so, Veoci also stores all information and data input, nullifying the need for dedicated recordkeeping efforts. Only manual input can

delete the history of a team in Veoci.

Beating the Odds

An outage is a risk to any organization, and it's why IT DR drills are so vital to all businesses. Time shows that outages are an inevitable reality of technology. Being prepared to respond then, and close the downtime gap, is be a top priority for any team. Drills are an important part of that, and any tool that can add value to your drills should be utilized.