

Tech Talk: How did you weather the power outage?

By **MJ Shoer**

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The recent power outages were a flashback to the ice storm of just over a year ago. Fortunately, they were much shorter, but the impact to business was very much the same.

Most businesses were shut down by the widespread outages for the entire day Friday and many remained so through the weekend and a few, even into the next week. For those that did get power back over the weekend, many called in their staff to get caught up and prepared for the coming week.

Hopefully, you learned many lessons from the ice storm and had contingency plans to keep your business functioning through this latest storm. If your business experienced interruptions that caused any serious issues for your operations, here are some steps you may take to insure your business can function through an outage, whether it be a short one or long:

With any issue like this, communication is often the first priority. You need to get word to your teams about the state of your operations and keep them updated on what is happening at the office and what may be needed of them. Equally as important is communication with your clients and business partners, so they know your business is OK and what you are doing to continue to operate, especially if you provide a service they require whether they have power or not. For most businesses, there are two critical aspects to communications: e-mail and phone.

Most phone services should provide you with disaster recovery options of some form. A common practice, when dealing with a power outage or even the rare failure of telephone hardware, is to seamlessly have calls routed to another destination. If your company has multiple locations, you may be able to leverage that and have calls routed from the affected location to an operational one. If your business is a single office, you should be able to work with your provider to have your phones seamlessly redirected to company cell phones. For example, at our office, our main line and each of our direct dial phone lines are automatically forwarded to cell phones of our team. This ensured, both during the ice storm, as well as the recent power outages, that we had continuous phone coverage throughout the event. You may also want to consider leveraging an out-of-state answering service to ensure a live person responds to your callers in the event of a widespread power outage.

For e-mail, it is becoming a real need to have continuity services in place to ensure you can send and receive e-mail even when your company mail server may not be available. This may be due to a server problem or a power outage. In either case, it's becoming necessary to have a solution in place that will allow you to be able to access e-mail 24-7, regardless of what may be happening at your physical locations. This is an area where cloud technologies provide strategic leverage. Most cloud services providers are located in highly reliable data centers that stay online no matter what is happening around them. Therefore, if you have Internet access, whether at your home or via your smartphone or other wireless device, you can get at your e-mail and stay in touch.

Speaking of data centers, if any of your technology has critical client facing aspects, like an online store or database, you may want to seriously consider placing those servers at a high availability data center as opposed to your office. Doing so will allow your company's public presence, much like your Web site, to remain online even if your office is not.

For some businesses, a generator may be practical. Just like the consideration of a generator to provide power to your home, you need to be able to financially justify the investment. However, depending how much revenue you generate on an hourly basis, this may be a wise thing to do to keep your office powered and functional during an outage. Again, be sure to address all elements of the equation, as it may not make much sense to have power at the office if none of your team is able to reach that office, but in many cases, it does.

And never forget about backup. Even if you do nothing to keep your office functional during a power outage or other catastrophic event, always have a reliable and tested backup solution that will protect your critical data and provide flexible recovery options should you need to access that data or even relocate your office as a result of an extreme event. These storms were a poignant reminder that you can never plan enough for unforeseen events. It is far better to have a plan and not need it, than need a plan and not have it.

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