

DISASTER RECOVERY

In 2005, "disaster recovery" became a household term in North America. On the heels of catastrophic events, including tsunamis and earthquakes in other parts of the world, the tremendous damage inflicted on the Gulf Coast of the United States by Hurricane Katrina and other storms demonstrated both the significant amount of destruction caused by natural disasters and the overwhelming rebuilding process that follows.

In many industries, disaster recovery and business continuance have been topics of discussion for some time. These recent, wide-reaching disastrous events have once again brought this necessary planning to the forefront. The problem is complex and can be costly. In the auto industry, for example, IT departments take pride in ensuring daily backups are maintained for parts databases, e-mail servers and network shared drives. This ensures that in the event of a database server failure, car production lines will be minimally impacted. The important thing to understand in this example is that the real value of the auto makers' business is not these databases or e-mail servers, but rather the actual work product — the automobiles they produce.

If auto makers had to store every automobile they manufactured in a single warehouse, their value would be extremely vulnerable to potential natural or other disasters. Although this "super" automobile storage facility is not a realistic option, it highlights what millions of broadcasters, news agencies and content owners do to store the lifeblood of their business — their videotape and film assets. It is difficult to comprehend how many of these assets have been lost in the aforementioned natural disasters.

Disaster recovery and business continuance differ fairly significantly in their end goals, but they share a

common progression path. Disaster recovery is just that — the ability to recover in the event of a disaster at a facility. Business continuance is the ability to remain on the air as a disaster is occurring, even if in a somewhat diminished capacity.

Content protection in a traditional non-digital environment is a demanding task, requiring duplication of every piece of videotape or film in a broadcaster's possession and subsequent transfer and storage of that material at a second site. By moving a known "good copy" of a media asset to an alternate facility or storage site, a company can prevent a calamity such as a fire from destroying years of valuable footage. This approach clearly falls into the category of disaster recovery. While this solution is effective, it is hardly efficient. The mere process of copying material is labor-intensive, particularly if proper quality-checking processes are put in place to ensure the best possible quality. In this scenario, every hour of broadcast material might require several hours of work to replicate. For most broadcasters, this amounts to years or even decades of duplication work. Even if a company were to make this investment, the matter of sorting, finding or repurposing specific material from within the tens of thousands of hours on tape or film presents a whole new challenge. In essence, this proposition is a no-go.

Replication of content in the analog world may not be feasible, but the broadcasters' transition to digital, file-based operations has facilitated much easier, much faster and much less-expensive means of content duplication. Digital files can be replicated at faster-than-real-time speeds, with little or no human intervention. However, even this manner of protecting content takes an initial investment of time and money.

through archive management

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Shown here is the control room for thematic playback at Broadcast Center Europe (BCE) in Luxembourg.