



# Automats of Readiness

By JEFF GARRISON

**A**utomats – those fast-food vending machines – were before my time.

I wasn't born in Gotham. I wasn't raised in the Windy City. I grew up hopelessly suburban and automats were mostly out of vogue before I showed up.

Still, whether seeing an automat in an old film, photos, or a period piece, I always thought they were cool. I was fascinated by them.

Not so fascinated, even at a young age, to know if I ate from one of those machines I'd likely find the food horrible. Grab a sandwich and find the bread either stale or soggy? Grab a piece of pie and find the meringue dry and dusty?

Nearly everywhere you look you find advertised disaster recovery (DR) and

business continuity (BC) products and services, all offering to provide solutions to meet all of your business' BC/DR needs.

This multitude of selections in the marketplace reminds me of automats, a virtual one stop shop offering everything you need, want, think-you-want, or haven't-thought-before-of-wanting-but-now-you-can't-live-without. All of them claim to be the best. Are those solutions what is best for the customer?

## Lots of Flavors, Lots of Selection

There is much to consider with BC/DR preparedness and how a business wishes to protect itself beyond protecting its data and deciding the type of recovery it wishes to invest in. Considerations when implementing a BC/DR solution may include.

- Do documents and templates exist or will those have to be created or acquired?
- How much of the human element do you wish to minimize?
- What about the staff, is their readiness accounted for?
- Are their gaps in your planned solution strategy? If so, are those gaps mitigated so the business can keep operating even during time of disaster.
- And lastly, does all of this tie together?

## The News Stand Next to the Automat

Sort of like grabbing that magazine or newspaper from the next door news stand, you need to have something to thumb through while enjoying that sandwich and fresh-ish slice of pie you just purchased. That something would be the documents and templates created in order to record and communicate the vision, goals, plans, and accomplishments of the BC/DR program. Documentation, whether built from the ground up for a new program, or retrofitted to an existing program, should be designed to be self-sustainable, scalable, as well as flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the BC/DR program.

Inflexible program models and templates are like that poorly prepared sandwich, not appealing to look at, too tough to chew, difficult to swallow, and certain to bring heartburn later.

## Keep the Business Going, Keep the Program Moving Forward

Business has to keep going, continue to move forward, not looking back. A stagnant business is soon to be an extinct business, if it isn't one already. Since not everyone likes the same sandwich, preparedness options cover a broad spectrum, offering multiple and varied methods designed to keep the business going, protect the staff, and secure the critical data should tragedy strikes.

A disaster or other comparable event cannot be allowed to stop business from proceeding, from operating and growing. At worst, it needs to be a temporary obstacle, similar to an automat door that will not open because the coin slot is

jammed and simply needs to be pried open or unjammed so business can resume.

### **Does it Come With Instructions? And in What Language is it Written?**

That's not all. There is more than simply building a strong BC/DR solution. The ability to recover your systems may be in place; but how does it mesh with the needs of the business?

In meetings between the business and recovery service providers, invariably someone utters the comment, "We have this covered." However, regarding whether the recovery strategy is fully in synch with the processes and needs of the business, talk further.

If you drill down the details further, more often than not, the earlier comment gets amended to, "We don't have that covered." This declaration comes complete with optional shoulder shrug and head shaking from the person making the previous statement.

A recovery solution not fully supporting the needs of the business is simply an incomplete solution. The business may require a one of their critical systems fully recovered and available within one hour. In spite of that requirement, limitations may currently be in place, infrastructure or otherwise, preventing the system from being available for eight hours.

Simply restoring a one hour system in eight hours and calling it a success is not the whole story. How does the business continue this piece of operations for those critical eight hours until the system is restored? Is there a strategy in place and does the mitigation successfully bridge the gap between when the system needs to be up and when the system is finally operational?

The business assumes the provider will solve this dilemma. The provider may assume the business has this covered. Sometimes both sides are wrong.

Assuming the business already has this addressed is a dangerous risk. Tools and strategies need to be available when the answer is not the answer anyone wanted to hear.

### **Who's Making the Coffee?**

Too often overlooked in the recovery model is the individual business user, the backbone of the business. Having systems

successfully recovered is great. Having mitigations in place to ensure operations can continue until systems are restored is wonderful. What about the staff during a disaster? Can they get to their desk? Can they get to the office? Is there an office to get to? All of those questions must be answered.

Mobility, and dedicated time-of-event equipment, along with documenting detailed operational procedures, are all good steps towards an effective strategy for your staff.

If the recovery solution is "we'll acquire it at time of disaster" hopefully that comes equipped with a recovery time objective of "eventually, maybe, or we hope so." Without a clear cut mechanism and path for delivery, there are far too many variables in play during a disaster to guarantee you'll be able to run down to the local electronics super store and stock up on your needs.

### **Automation for What? And Why?**

When discussing recovery preparedness, talk often goes in the direction of automation. Someone states the lack of a mature BC/DR program as a cause for why they lack a clear program statement, repeatable practices, program transparency nor qualitative documentation. In the next breath, the same speaker then mentions how they desire to automate much of their work. Which begs the question; is this the right time to introduce automation? Is it better to first build and evolve into a mature program rather than bypass the "how to" part and leap frog directly into automation? Possibly, even likely; though, this may be a path to realization that must travel its full course and reach its destination on its own.

Why automation? Why do you want it? Is it to introduce improvements to what you currently do well? Or may you are looking to fill a gap due to operational tasks not currently in place? If you are looking to throw a tarp of automation over processes not currently in place, automation may not be a good decision at this point in time. First, shouldn't you learn how to do it correctly and do it well, before choosing to bury it under the guise of automation?

A mature program is not solely an automated program. Automation is an

improvement to program maturity, an add-on value. A mature program is a program that has a direction, knows its direction, and proceeds in that direction in a planned, thoughtful, coordinated and repeatable manner. A mature program is a transparent program, one who publicizes its goal, direction, limitations, activities, accomplishment, along with how that work was achieved. A mature program stands behind the work, keeps an open mind, always striving to improve.

The path to a mature program may not be easy; but, it is simple. First step, choose to be mature; from there move forward. Be consistent and repeatable in your efforts. Whether large or small, build your foundation and commit to improve and always build from where you are at. Learn how to build a mature program. Learn how to work as a mature program. Your strength truly is as strong as the weakest link. If your team cannot work as a mature program, cannot learn to work as a part of a mature program, then your program is not mature; at least not yet.

When you have built a mature program, you need to understand how it works, from tip to tail. Once you understand how it works, then that may be the time to introduce automation. Then from there, understand where the benefits of automation stop, whether you are prepared to step in and resume doing the work when automation is not available or fails to deliver the way you wanted.

### **Wrapping Up Before All The Good Stuff Is Taken?**

As with automats of old, there is no guarantee the choice made is the ideal choice. Though better than automats, BC/DR solutions and strategies available to a business may already exist within the infrastructure and services of the business or the business may choose to create it themselves. You do not have to scour the city searching for that egg salad sandwich or solution meeting your appetite or business needs.

For me, I hope there is still some pie left in one of those slots; and that it is not too stale.



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