

# Recovery Time Objectives (RTO): Are They Valid?

by **A.Alex Fullick**, MBCI, CBCP, CBRA



If you ask anyone in your organization when they have to have operations up and running after a disaster, you can bet the answer will come back ‘right away.’ If a timeframe comes with the response, it’ll be something like, “24 hours”. In fact, it’s almost always 24 hours or drastically less. Even groups that have nothing to do with front line client interaction say they have to be up and running in no time, as they are just as important as front line (customer facing) personnel. Now, all people (employees) are important and offer something to the corporation but not all are considered as important by *external* sources; the clients / customers / vendors / suppliers.

Too often these Recovery Time Objectives (RTO) set by managers, employees or SMEs aren’t validated. They are taken at face value and incorporated into whatever plan is necessary. Since they haven’t been vetted and validated, you can end up with the entire organization needing to be up and running immediately, which in a disaster is next to impossible. You can have all the latest mirrored equipment in the world and a large workforce from which to draw resources but you won’t be able to get everything up and running and back to normal immediately.

This is particularly true with companies that utilize duplicate site or alternate sites. If a multi-facility corporation has a disaster at one of its sites, the overflow will go to another site that might not be equipped to take on the additional workload at the drop of a hat. It may take some preparation and ramp-up time before that can happen.

If a corporation uses a vendor prescribed service it may not get access to the “DR Site” for up to 24 hours, so that vendor can get the site prepared for the corporation. They too need to bring in their resources and mobilize their force to be able to help.

As a result, the systems, processes and policies that need to be up and running first, better be ones that are critical to the life-blood of the corporation. Are you really going to worry about an internal development initiative over ensuring that clients can reach you (i.e. the Telecommunication area and the Client Service Department)? Which is more important? The project area may have said they need to be up and running in 24 hours and the Client Service area may have given the same answer but which RTO is valid? (Note: Often the Client Services area is much less than 24 hours.)

# **Recovery Time Objectives (RTO): Are They Valid?**

by **A.Alex Fullick**, MBCI, CBCP, CBRA



Once you've completed a Business Impact Analysis (BIA) and developed the RTO for each service & department, you've got to validate that the order in which services are to become available is;

- Realistic
- In line with current technology capabilities
- In line with Executive expectations
- Can be done (and if not, obtain additional funding/resources to make it happen).

Keep in mind that when you review the RTO listing – the priority order in which services are to become available – that dependencies are taken into account. Often service (or system) “x” will become available at the allotted timeframe and at that time a user will tell you that they can't do anything because a dependant system – or process/service/function – isn't available to allow them to perform work activities. It turns out that that dependant process/service/function and even the department that owns it, isn't scheduled to be up for another 3 days; they said they can be down (unavailable) for a period of time. Thus, the RTOs aren't valid and the services you'd hoped you could make available to customers, let alone your employees, aren't available; you're no further ahead. In fact, you're behind your recovery schedule now because you have to scramble and get that dependant service/system up and running, which you hadn't planned on starting for a couple of days.

Always remember to validate the RTOs and prioritize the services/processes prior to starting any restoration and recovery strategies. If not, you could end up building a system that doesn't meet your needs and even though you have lots of backup equipment in place, you can't get the things you want up and running when you need them; it'll be a hodgepodge of when things become available.

*Taken from the book “Made Again – Volume 1: Practical Advice for Business Continuity Programs”*

by **A.Alex Fullick**, MBCI, CBCP, CBRA