

## A FIRST HAND REPORT ON WILMA (DISASTER PLANNING- Part Two)

By Joseph Marion

In my last column I began to tell you about our disastrous disaster recover plan in the wake of Hurricane Wilma. When I left off, it had been a couple of days after the hurricane hit. We received new generators specifically designed for computer equipment and had gas cans flown in from Minnesota. Gasoline to power the generators was still in short supply so we had arranged a schedule to stand on line and wait for gas in the evening. Power was sort of “under control.”

Our next area to focus on was our mission critical web site, [www.ascdi.com](http://www.ascdi.com). The Association of Service and Computer Dealers, International (ASCDI) offers a service to computer dealers around the world via our web site in which we allow computer resellers to list hardware they are looking to buy or sell. A by-product of that listing is an email which is sent out to all subscribers detailing the listing. Our site sends out over 250,000 emails a day and resellers depend on our site to make a living, so we have to stay up and running 24/7.

### OUR ORIGINAL PLAN

Many months ago we developed our Web Disaster Recovery Plan. Our plan was simple. We had set up a duplicate site called [www2.ascdi.com](http://www2.ascdi.com) that was physically located in Atlanta, Georgia. In the event of a disaster we would direct our customers to our backup site.

### REALITY CHECK

The night before Hurricane Wilma hit Florida, we sent out email messages to all of our customers telling them that we were moving to our backup site and that they could find us at [www2.ascdi.com](http://www2.ascdi.com). What we found out very soon was that many of our customers did not read that message. Without knowing our new web address, customers and prospective customers could not find us. To further complicate matters when people tried to email us their email bounced because our email address was no longer @ascdi.com.

We realized early on that we had problems. Although we had no power from Florida Power and Light, we did have power from our generators, a couple of phone lines, and a T-1 Line that was miraculously working throughout and after the hurricane. So word started to creep in through our two working phone lines that people could not find us on the web.

Another problem we discovered was that our backup site in Atlanta did not have the bandwidth to handle the amount of email traffic our web sites produce. Viewing our web pages was not a problem, but the 250,000 emails a day we send out was going out SLOW.

## FORMULATE PLAN B

So we were faced with a dilemma. Our backup sites were not performing up to standard, people couldn't find us on the web and our primary location had two hungry generators that needed to be fed fuel every 5 hours, assuming you could find some.

It was time to regroup. First we had to fix the fact the people could not find us on the web.

We contacted BellSouth (who manages our DNS Server) and asked them to expedite our request to change the IP Address of our web site to our backup servers. That way when someone typed in [www.ascdi.com](http://www.ascdi.com), the DNS Servers would point them to our backup servers rather than our primary servers. To our surprise, BellSouth changed our DNS in a matter of hours. Ironically, when we formulated our Web Disaster Recovery Plan, we had considered doing this instead of setting up [www2.ascdi.com](http://www2.ascdi.com), but we ruled it out. We were afraid that it would take BellSouth too long to make the change and even longer for DNS servers around the world to be propagated with that new information.

Next we had to fix that bandwidth problem. The ISP who handles our Internet connection at our Atlanta backup location told us that they could not increase our bandwidth for several weeks. So we had to live with what we had.

Since we had a T-1 Line working at our primary location we decided to change our programs so that the web sites were hosted at our backup location 24/7, but our email would be redirected to the servers back at our primary location during the day. At night, when our email traffic was low, we shut off our servers at our primary location and sent the mail out of our backup servers. (At night we went hunting for fuel to run the servers during the day.) Talk about survival! Sleep was a luxury we could not afford at the time.

This scenario went on for two weeks and two days. And then, like nothing had happened, power came back on line. But we would never be the same after that humbling experience.