

Too Much Maintenance Support?

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DON'T PAY TWICE, IT'S ALRIGHT

One BIG aspect of your IT budget is break/fix expenses. Most IT managers who have ever had a disk crash have purchased and configured redundant systems and components. But, have you taken a look at your maintenance contracts lately? If you are like most IT Managers you have purchased expensive, fast response hardware maintenance contracts.

Why? You have a redundant system don't you? Why pay for service levels that are much more appropriate to non-redundant systems?

WHEN LESS IS MORE

Depending upon your business requirements and level of redundancy, most 20 minute, 2 hour or 4 hour service response times can be easily extended to 6, 12, or even 24 hours without risk. Some specific areas where IT managers purchase high service level coverage yet have low risk due to having redundant systems include tape drives, storage systems with Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disk (RAID) configurations, off-line development systems, and high speed printers.

For example, consider your tape subsystems. If you are like many shops, you have banks of tape drives that are used nightly. Unless you have a very tight backup window, the loss of one drive for 24 hours is an inconvenience but certainly not an impediment to meeting your production metrics.

Another example is your high-speed printers. If you use these printers for mission critical work such as printing invoices or checks, you certainly do not want to service a printer during a check run because this can be a time-consuming repair which can adversely impact your mailing schedule. Chances are good you already have a second printer for backup for this very reason.

PLAY THE ODDS

Experiencing multiple instances of a redundant component simultaneously failing in a relatively short window (24-48 hours) is akin to gambling on lightning striking in the same place twice. You can start to see how your investment may feel reassuring, but may actually be costing you more money than is necessary.

Most Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) maintenance contract prices are as much as 20-50% higher for aggressive service level agreements such as 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with a 2 hour response versus less stringent service levels such as 12 hour coverage, with a 6 hour response.

FIX the COST of FIXING

So what can you do to rectify this costly situation? There are three basic steps you can take:

1. Assess your technical environment and understand how it relates to your business needs
2. Negotiate flexible service level agreements with your maintenance provider
3. Engage your maintenance provider in preventive maintenance programs for any mechanical devices

First, make a thorough assessment of each device or subsystem in your environment so you truly understand the resiliency of your systems with this new approach in mind. With this data in hand you can determine the appropriate service level for repair on each device when compared against the actual business uptime requirements for the system.

Most OEMs prefer to bundle one service level across all data center equipment, especially for small or mid-size customers. Third party maintenance providers are often much more amenable to consider your desire for various service levels across different systems. In fact, if your provider automatically extends the same service levels across all of your data center equipment; they're not looking after your best interests. Ask your third party service provider to recommend a variety of service levels for your data center equipment, balancing the coverage you need with the costs required to meet your uptime requirements.

If you already have a relationship with a maintenance vendor, express your desire to re-evaluate your coverage needs at your next contract renewal or even sooner if possible. If your provider is unwilling to provide flexible service levels by system, it may be time to look for a new support service provider. A good place to look for third party maintenance providers is www.ascdi.com. Click on the link for Tech Services.

Act Proactively

Finally, be sure to implement a preventive maintenance (PM) program with your service provider for mechanical devices like printers and tape libraries. While it is likely that you do have backup devices for these key elements of your data center environment, their mechanical components will experience wear and tear and therefore are prone to experience higher failure rates than solid-state systems.

It is quite easy to call for service to repair down devices. Setting up time and taking a device off-line for preventive maintenance can be an "out of sight, out of mind" type of activity. Be sure you and your maintenance provider have made clear plans and usage triggers for preventive maintenance in advance for any devices that have a recommended PM schedule.

Don't pay for more maintenance services than you need. Get the services you need, when you need them and save money in the process.

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