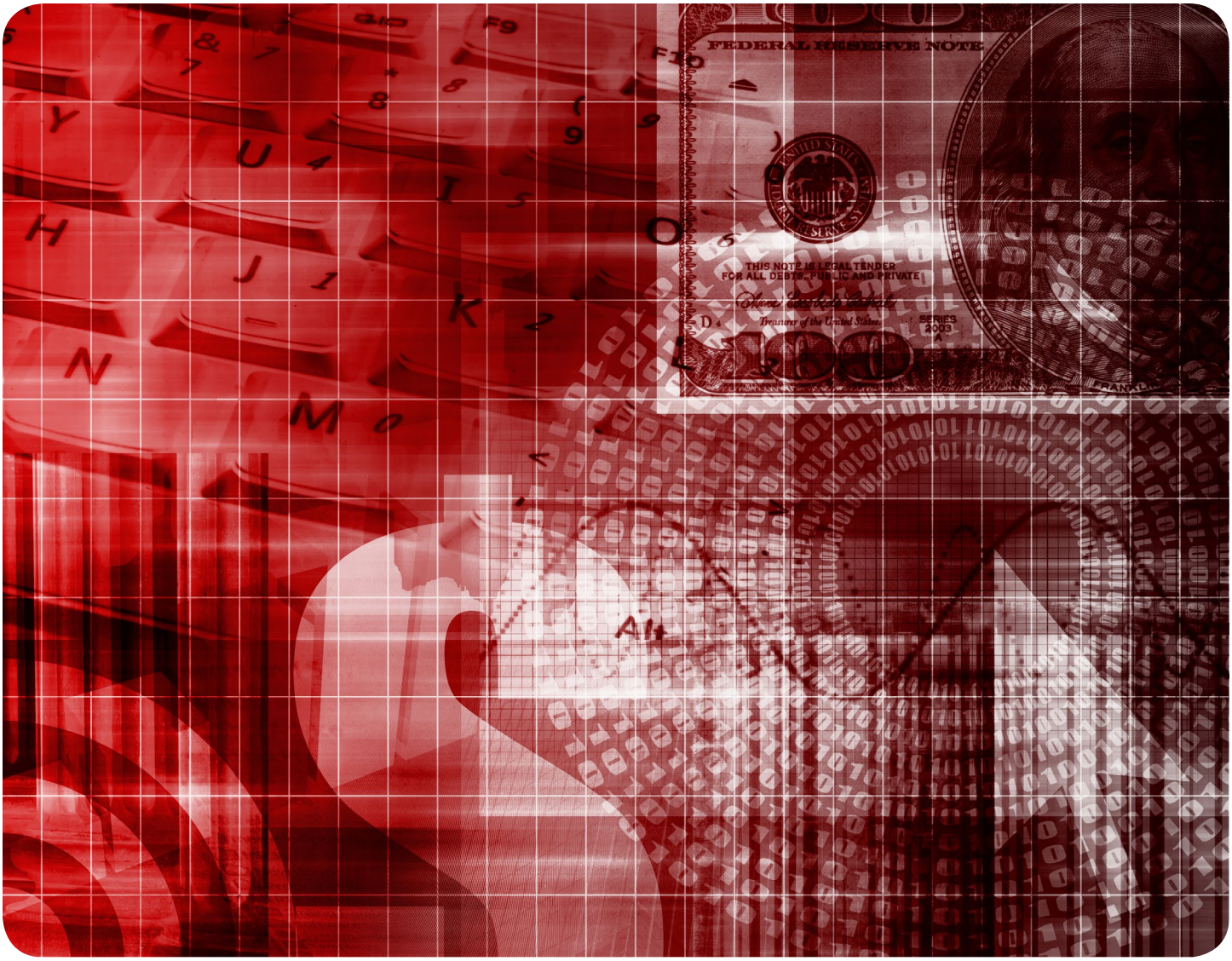

Increasing Revenue with Disaster Recovery and High Availability as a Service

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State of the Service Provider Market

As a Managed Service provider (MSP) you are facing increased competition from every angle. You are, as always, challenged with keeping your infrastructure and team skills up to date with the latest technologies as well as with finding and exploiting profitable markets and niches. But more importantly, you must provide unique service offerings that show excellent business value at an affordable cost.

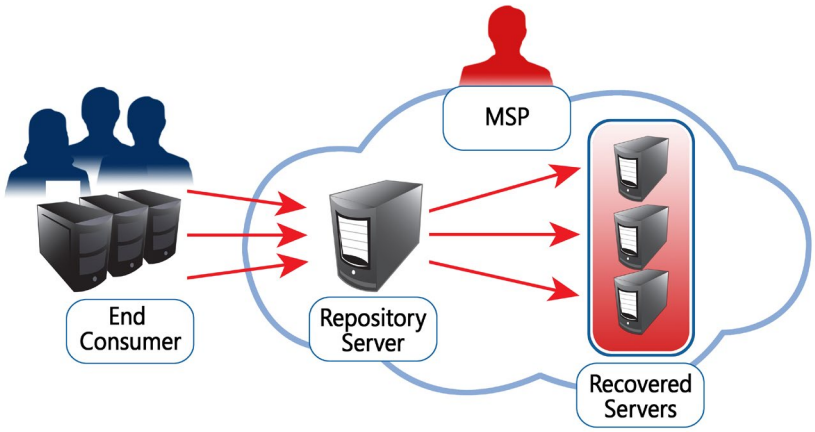
Ultimately, you need to simultaneously generate stable monthly revenue and differentiate yourself from your competition. To be successful today requires expanding your business model beyond the traditional "break-fix" model, replacing it with a more stable and recurring monthly revenue stream.

By offering disaster recovery and high availability as a service, you have the potential to create that stable monthly revenue and differentiate yourself at the same time.

DRaaS and HAaaS

Two valuable and profitable service offerings that are gaining traction among enterprises are Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS) and High Availability as a Service (HAaaS).

DRaaS in its most generic form is the provision of some level of remotely-hosted disaster recovery services to protect a client's data and applications. The first required component is replication. This ranges from basic replication for "backup" storage of data on through to maintaining complete server and storage images that are updated in real time.



Beyond the safekeeping of the clients' bits and bytes, the level of recovery capability that can be offered varies. In other words, replication is only part of the answer. It is not DR unless they can recover. Recovery can be accomplished in several ways, with the recovery methods and technologies usually being dictated by the maximum downtime the client can tolerate after a server failure or site disaster. But in general, DRaaS implies offering slower, even manual recovery options, rather than extremely rapid return to operation.

HAaaS on the other hand, takes DRaaS a step further. With HAaaS, in addition to replicating servers and applications in real-time, if a server fails, the HA server and storage, etc. to which the client is replicating must be able to take over processing immediately. This requires HA technology that ensures that the server's program and OS settings are also replicated continuously and that the applications on an existing cloud-hosted VM can be activated immediately or that an entire new VM can be automatically provisioned, configured and activated within seconds or just a few minutes.

How DRaaS and HAaaS Help Increase Profits

The core value proposition that DRaaS and HAaaS providers can offer is to help their clients accomplish their disaster recovery goals without requiring large capital expenditures.

For example, for a medium-sized enterprise to replicate their tier-1 servers to a secondary datacenter of their own for disaster recovery protection, they need, at a minimum, servers, SAN storage, bandwidth, and a replication solution. Additionally, this secondary datacenter will incur ongoing maintenance, will require periodic upgrades, and will need to be kept relatively in-sync with the primary datacenter.

All of this requires very significant up-front capital expense as well as ongoing operational expenses. For enterprises to create their own HAaaS solution, the much higher cost of having live servers with low latency / high bandwidth connections means that HAaaS is even less less affordable and more difficult to implement than DRaaS.

In many cases, the costs and challenges associated with DR and HA are simply too high and, as a result, many companies default back to simply relying solely on offsite tape backup storage as their disaster recovery protection. However, when offered full featured, reliable DR and HA options that avoid the complexity and CapEx burden, their view of the cost / benefit balance certainly changes.

At base, this is why service providers are finding DRaaS and HAaaS services to be in-demand and much more profitable than the traditional services they have provided previously. HA and DR are more than ready to move into the realm of "As A Service."

Typical Challenges in Offering DRaaS and HAaaS

If you have looked at offering DRaaS and HAaaS in the past, you might have been deterred by some aspects of the business. Typical challenges that MSPs cite when questioning the viability of offering DR and HA services include:

- The cost of building your own HA/DR infrastructure including hardware and software
- The time and risk associated with recouping the large capital expense that you would have to invest
- The complexity of using expensive hardware-based storage area network (SAN) replication and the limitation of serving only clients whose SAN and server hardware match your own
- The requirements to integrate the client's replication solution and interface with your own
- The difficulty replicating the recovered servers back to their original location at the customer; done only rarely, you must ensure readiness and expertise to deliver this essential function
- Supporting multiple operating systems, hypervisors, applications and storage environments
- Fiduciary responsibility and security/liability concerns with handling a client's most critical server data and applications

However, if you learn more about some the latest HA and DR solutions available today, you'll find that all of these challenges can be met and a viable, profitable business model can be developed.

Best Practices in Selecting a DRaaS and HAaaS Solution Partner

Clearly, you will need to choose HA and DR technology providers to partner with. When evaluating DRaaS and HAaaS partners and their solutions for yourself, how will you select from the numerous options available today?

Here are 7 must-have features and capabilities to look for when considering any HA or DR technology or solution provider:

1. **Multi-platform support –** Ensure that the solutions cover physical, virtual, and cloud environments. This implies both handling the newest platforms and the ability to continue to support legacy physical infrastructure for many years.
2. **Multi-cloud support –** Your clients are increasingly moving their production infrastructure out to the cloud. But which one? You'll need the ability to

support HA and DR for systems residing on multiple clouds. This multi-cloud capability also lets you support clients who choose to migrate from one cloud to another.

3. **Recovery into the cloud –** rather than just having a "backup Image" of physical or virtual machines in the cloud, companies increasingly want to be able to switch to or recover to cloud-hosted servers, and to just as easily switch back. This includes reverting back to physical servers, often called "Cloud-to-Ground."
4. **Flexible licensing –** your technology provider should offer you licensing and billing options for their products which fully support and enable the per-connection or monthly subscription service model that your customers are demanding from you.
5. **Real-time replication –** Continuous protection without the need for a "backup window."
6. **Scalability –** your chosen DRaaS or HAaaS solution must be scalable, able to grow as your client's needs grow, and to support all your potential clients, from SMBs to major enterprises.

Ensure that any technology provider you partner with can meet all of these crucial requirements.

Recommendations

DRaaS and HAaaS solutions have matured, providing more features, usability, and affordability. The best way for you to support customers with greater functionality and to build that profitable, long-term loyalty is to offer them services such as DRaaS and HAaaS. Smart MSPs who expand their service offering will not only retain customers but also add an additional stream of highly profitable income.

About the Author

David Davis is a well-known virtualization and cloud computing expert, author, speaker, and analyst. He holds several certifications including VCP5, VCAP-DCA, CCIE #9369, and has been awarded the VMware vExpert award 5 years running. Additionally, David has spoken at major conferences like VMworld and authored hundreds of articles for websites and print publications. David's library of popular video training courses can be found at Pluralsight.com. For more information on how to contact David, his speaking schedule, and his latest project, visit his personal website - **VirtualizationSoftware.com**.