Availability key to profitability over Black Friday, Cyber Monday weekend

By Claude Schuck   25 Nov 2016

The increasing popularity of Black Friday and Cyber Monday in South Africa is seeing retailers gearing up for what is expected to be a bumper sales weekend. However the influx of visitors to e-tailers places websites under increased pressure, making availability a key concern.

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The end of November has become an increasingly vital part of the trading calendar. In fact, Black Friday and Cyber Monday could represent a significant portion of online sales annually for brands. It has therefore become imperative that online shops do not suffer from costly downtime or other outages.

According to the 2016 Veeam Availability Report the estimated average annual cost of downtime globally for businesses can go up to $16 million, while the average hourly cost of downtime of one mission-critical application translates to more than R1-million. Given the huge amount of consumer spending that is anticipated over the coming weekend, no retailer can afford to have any hiccups in the sales process.

Looking beyond the financial impact that this represents, the reputational damage to a brand could be even more disastrous. If businesses were to experience any disruption over the next few days, they could lose customers to their competitors forever.

Here are a few tips to ensure a business stays available not only during this weekend, but the festive season as well.

Ditch legacy SLAs: SLAs from the legacy world simply do not cut it in this new digital era. Legacy IT still deals in SLAs that are two to four hours or even longer, when retailers need to be dealing in minutes or even seconds when it comes to downtime – especially with the amount of money at stake during the busy periods of Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas. Even if IT vendors meet your reliance on a two-hour recovery agreement the brand damage will have already been long done.

Capacity planning: To determine what the potential peak loads are for site servers, remove the guess work by reviewing previous figures using monitoring data and plan for a significant uptick beyond anything seen before. For greater capacity, consider moving less vital workloads to the public cloud to benefit from its scale.

Real-time monitoring: Preparing in advance is an obvious tip, but it is vital to focus on having a simple escalation process in place of being alerted to any potential issues in the backup and virtual environments of a company. Not only does this speed up troubleshooting of issues, and diagnosis of root causes, it can also enable teams to manage a potential issue before it materialises into an actual problem.

Test, test and test again: Having a backup schedule is good, but it is not good enough. You need to ask some serious questions. For example, how long does it take to recover the backup? Do you have the ability to restore a certain file, where are those files caches, where is your whole system stored for that matter? How often do you test those backups to ensure they work and can be used as a point of rebuild? How many of your backups would fail? And above all how often are you performing these vital backup audits that could mean ultimately impacting the bottom line when time is money?

Availability is critical for retailers. Being able to quickly backup and restore data in the event of an outage ensures customer satisfaction during one of the busiest retail periods of the year.

Fortunately, Veeam research has found that respondents from the retail, distribution, and transport sector confirmed that their organisations have increased their requirements regarding minimising application downtime (57%) and guaranteeing access to data (52%) in the past two years.

Big shopping days such as Black Friday provide a reality check for many companies on the importance of the data centre and availability. We have to wait and see whether local businesses have done their due diligence to ensure they have the right processes and contingencies in place for this busy shopping period.

ABOUT CLAUDE SCHUCK

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