

Eliminating IT downtime will keep passengers happy during the summer season

With the South African summer holidays fast approaching, the travel industry is under pressure to ensure always-on access to customers who want to make reservations and bookings using a myriad of devices. Claude Schuck, regional manager for Africa at Veeam, discusses the impact that downtime could have and what companies in the sector have to consider.



Claude Schuck

The need to accommodate passengers and cargo coincides with savvy consumers increasingly demanding more for less from their airlines. As a result, the cost per airline ticket is declining while on-time demands increase.

The implications of downtime for companies across the aviation industry are potentially massive. Not only is the cost of just one hour of aircraft downtime due to maintenance failures close to [R200,000](#), unexpected periods of downtime of their online flight booking systems could see businesses losing out on millions of rands every month.

The pressure is, therefore, building on airlines to ensure their systems are online and available at all times, but it also impacts on businesses up and down the travel industry chain.

Industry focus

Just think about the number of businesses and providers that you connect with when going on holiday. While a few minutes of downtime can frustrate and anger passengers, the financial and reputational impact on businesses that build their reputations on the smooth running of flights could be crippling.

IT plays a role in almost every airport operation, from passenger check-in, security checks, and flight information screens through to baggage sorting, gate finding, and baggage carousels. These processes and workflows are supported by more than 25 mission-critical systems such as security, identity management, and a number of databases. These systems are often rooted in niche and bespoke applications, as well as pervasive back-office applications.

So if the system of an airport goes down, then this has obvious effects on the companies that provide baggage checking technology in the airport, and the providers of software that power car hire systems at airport stores, both of which will be disrupted by delayed passengers. Whenever downtime occurs the knock-on effects impact businesses including travel agents and holiday operators, through to technology providers in airports as well as travel providers and hotels when passengers reach their desired destination late.

Another factor to consider now is the detriment to the value of brands associated with these issues. Consumers now have a smartphone in their pocket that enables them to converse with millions of potential customers by way of social media. No longer are the issues of customers kept to the manageable areas of email and customer service phone lines. If a customer is impacted by a business not being available, there is a strong chance they will talk about it online publicly.

The likelihood of these issues arising is greater than ever during the December holidays, which are usually the busiest time of year for these companies. It is the worst possible time for IT systems to go down, so it is vital that businesses do everything they can to ensure they remain constantly available throughout this period. The challenges are not solely isolated to the travel industry, as businesses across all sectors are coming under increasing customer pressure to be always-on

and avoid any form of downtime.

Proactive management

According to the [2016 Veeam Availability Report](#), the average cost per hour due to application downtime for South African organisations is close to R1.2-million. And, with some companies reporting an average length of five hours of unplanned downtime of mission-critical applications, the impact on business operations can be significant. To ensure that services, applications, and data are available throughout the holiday season, it is not only important to focus on IT solutions but also routine.

Planning for restoring data, in the fastest and easiest way possible, is essential if businesses are to avoid unnecessary downtime and loss of revenue. Similarly, real-time monitoring and alerts can also help businesses target potential issues before they develop into a service becoming unavailable.

Currently, the average number of failures in modern enterprises remains high, with 84 percent of senior IT decision makers worldwide admitting [suffering an 'Availability Gap'](#) between what IT can deliver and what users demand. This gap costs almost R220-million a year in lost revenue and productivity, in addition to the negative impact on customer confidence and brand integrity (according to 68 percent and 62 percent of respondents, respectively).

Businesses should ensure they have resilient, highly available IT infrastructures and fast recovery tools in place to prevent the possibility of costly downtime, data loss, and delays.

It is becoming ever more critical that businesses understand that the always-on availability of their IT systems isn't a 'nice to have', but a foundational requirement of their infrastructure. Businesses shouldn't let the lack of availability stop them from seizing the opportunities that the summer holidays bring this year.

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