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Criticall solutions are used by some of the biggest brand names in Europe, as well as by 3 of the USA's Fortune Top Ten companies. Such blue-chip clients rely on Criticall to deliver in a crisis and can demand high levels of service availability. This is achieved by implementing best operational practice at its two replicated datacentres, to meet the most stringent location recommendations set by the USA's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which regulates the American financial markets.

Criticall provide emergency notification services to both major corporations and small scale enterprises alike, using their market-leading EmergencyCall ASP (Application Service Provider) offering. Since the service is designed to be there for customers when they themselves may be experiencing an emergency, such customers rightly demand that the hosted service itself should be robust. This covers both security and availability considerations. EmergencyCall ASP service operates under 128 bit SSL encryption, with discrete database instances keeping hosted customer data separate. The facilities where the platforms are themselves housed are purposebuilt, secure premises, with strict biometric access control systems. This is the same level of protection that

can typically be expected from online banking service providers.

Independent assessments of Criticall's ASP infrastructure have been carried out by one of the UK's largest banks and one of the world's largest IT providers, with positive recommendations in both cases. To maintain the level of protection against the latest forms of electronic threat, Criticall's ASP service is independently assessed by a specialist agency, approved by the UK Government's GCHQ and have been awarded the relevant Check Certificate for security.

Beyond security considerations, other threats to overall availability are manifold, as there are many links in the chain of an overall, integrated, end-to-end service for voice and data communications. This chain includes power supply, the computer hardware, the operating systems, the application environments, the web server, the internet service provider, the network connections, the gateway to the SMS/pager service provider, plus the voice communications carrier themselves. An outage in any one of these components will affect the overall availability figure for the ASP service. Criticall

recognised that certain factors were beyond their ability to directly control and more drastic action was required to achieve the target 99.995% overall availability, or around only 25 minutes a year offline.

Elliot Pittam, Criticall's Technical Manager responsible for the ASP service comments: "If you have only one site, you have multiple single points of failure and you can expect to achieve about 99% availability a month fairly consistently.

Although it sounds a lot, it still means that your service can be down for over 7 hours a month and still be within SLA! Our customers wanted more. To achieve our target levels was not realistically achievable with one site, no matter how robust our own systems were, because we had to rely on suppliers who could not guarantee us the necessary levels of service. The solution for us was simple, although it comes at a premium, which is why so few hosted service providers actually do it. We replicate everything: the hardware, the environment, the data, the dedicated data connections, the phone lines – everything! However, we use diverse routing and different providers at both sites, in case one has a major, enterprise-wide service outage".

Criticall has chosen datacentre specialists to provide the hosting environments. One is in London, for ease of reference visits for most customers. The Secondary site is temporarily located at Criticall's

Chiswick office building, before being moved to BT's purpose-built datacentre facility in Cardiff. Ian Hammond, Criticall's CEO explains the reasoning behind the move: "We wanted to have the best quality datacentre available outside of London and we think this fits the bill perfectly. It has the geographic advantage of being located over 200km from our Primary site. That is the magic number that the SEC (www.sec.gov) in America recommends between primary and back-up data sites. Although most of our customers are major global corporations, privately they admit that even they do not comply with this recommendation. However, for such a business-critical solution, we are happy to be maintaining the highest of standards."

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