



[IT MATTERS]

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What Happens When Your Warehouse Is Unplugged?

In warehouses, business as usual relies on steady and stable conditions—but these are not guaranteed. Numerous situations can disrupt productivity: A hurricane or ice storm comes through and knocks the power out for several days. You outgrow your warehouse and have to shut down while you move to a larger facility. The server finally crashes, and you have a total hard-drive failure.

It's not a question of *if*, but *when* your warehouse experiences a power outage. In such a situation, what happens to your warehouse management system (WMS)? Is it accessible during an extended power outage? Will you be able to immediately resume managing your inventory when the power returns? What do you do in the interim?

The following three technology management approaches can affect your warehouse operations' connectivity during and after a power outage.

1. On-site WMS hosting. WMS is an invaluable tool to help manage warehouse inventory and increase ROI. But as with any IT investment, businesses must make careful decisions about infrastructure and data hosting. One option is purchasing a WMS and hosting it on-site in the warehouse. This solution works well for businesses that already have the required IT capacity, and prefer to keep their data within the walls of their warehouse.

But a major downside to on-site hosting is that when the power goes out, the WMS goes down, unless the facility operates a backup generator. Downtime in a warehouse can mean a big hit to revenue. In this scenario, would your facility be able to pick and ship?

2. Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). One popular option — particularly among small and mid-sized companies — is a SaaS solution, which allows business owners to subscribe to a WMS for a monthly fee. This flexible solution tailors the service to each company's needs, and avoids upfront investments such as software licenses and technical infrastructure.

The SaaS model allows a WMS to be hosted through the technology provider. This third-party cloud offers the same data security and performance as a WMS hosted on-site, but because the infrastructure is hosted elsewhere, the software is unaffected by local power outages.

When the power fails, employees can work wirelessly through a virtual private network, which means you can provide information to customers and keep tabs on your inventory without losing a beat.

3. Cloud storage. A third option is purchasing a WMS and hosting the IT infrastructure on a virtualized cloud system. Cloud storage saves the cost of upgrading on-site infrastructure—such as servers and telephone equipment—and the energy associated with local hosting. It provides a turnkey, fully operational and restorable infrastructure in the event of an extended power loss due to natural disaster. Even if one warehouse in your network is not operational, the WMS application is still available and all employees can access the applications as needed.

Keeping Steady

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to selecting a WMS. But business owners must be confident about their system's backup capability and operational availability during a major power failure.

Your data and the software that runs your business is your operation's lifeblood. Don't risk it with a premise-based system that is only as secure as the environment it's sitting in. ■