

Computer system failure: A nightmare for small business

By Tom Campbell

Imagine waking up one morning and finding that the customer information, supplier details, debtor and creditor information trustingly stored on your hard drive has suddenly disappeared without warning. No, it's not a nightmare.



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Critical data loss happens to thousands of businesses across the country for a variety of reasons and can occur in a surprising number of simple ways—viruses, power failures, power spikes (these may not even be noticed!), system crashes, external events such as flood, fire, theft, or vandalism, or even a simple user error.

Losing information, or even employee productivity due to server downtime, would be a major disaster for any small business. Backing up your systems and data on a reliable and accessible server should be as critical to your business plan as completing a sale.

Backups help give you peace of mind and save you time and money should anything terminal happen to your data files.

A backup is basically copying your files to disk or some other storage device, to provide a working copy ready to be restored if the original copy is lost, damaged, or corrupted. There are four basic media types that are currently used for backing up data from your computer's disk:

- **Disk to tape**—Modern tape backup is fairly fast and can have a large capacity approaching hundreds of gigabytes.

It is the cheapest solution when evaluated by cost per gigabyte. The tapes can be re-used in a rotation schedule, but have to be periodically replaced as they wear out.

- **Disk to CD/DVD**—Backing up to optical disks such as CDs or DVDs is good for small amounts of data ranging between .6 and 9 gigabytes. The media has a long lifespan (15+ years) but can only be used once unless special re-writable media is purchased, so there is a constant media expense.

Technology

- **Disk to disk**—Using a second hard drive to back data up to is the quickest backup and restore method. Capacity is large, approaching almost 1000 gigabytes with the newest disk drives. The cost of disk is falling, and this solution is quickly approaching the inexpensive cost of tape.

- **Disk to network**—Often this is done to an offsite location, where a central backup system has thousands of gigabytes available. The speed of backup is governed by the size of the network connection. The cost of network backup is the most expensive per gigabyte, but it also offers the most protection due to its automation and offsite features.

How often you make a data backup depends on how frequently the data changes, the value you place on the information, its importance to your business, and the cost of replacing or recreating it. If you consider that your data file is too important to lose, or that it would be costly to replace, then you must backup regularly must be easy to use, preferably automated and transparent to the users. If employees have to change their daily routine too much, then eventually the backups will not be completed.

Just because you run a backup does not guarantee that it has worked. There are numerous horror stories of PC users suddenly needing to restore and only then finding out that their backup procedure has been routinely failing. You should regularly test the backup to confirm that the data has been successfully backing up.

Periodically, a full restore of the backed up data should be done to spare computer equipment in order to make sure first that the data is still readable, second to ensure the restore process works, and third to determine how long recovery will take. Doing this exercise routinely will build confidence in the backups and the recovery plan.

Don't put off implementing a backup system until after disaster strikes. Evaluate the various backups systems available, use one, and make backing up a regular event, especially before any upgrades or changes.

InfoStewards



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Summary: InfoStewards, Inc. was started in 2006 in order to provide the I.T. services supporting business continuity and disaster recovery for any organization, large or small. The principals of InfoStewards, Inc. have more than 15 years experience in building and operating redundant and high-availability network and computer systems, on local, regional, and international scales.