

What Is Your Client Data Worth?

By Tom Lopolito

The current climate of disaster management has generated a mood of uncertainty and a dramatic surge of price increases in almost every area of daily life. Homeowners' insurance policies, for example, have doubled in the last four years, and prices at the gas pumps are historically high. While these issues are frustrating, they do not compare to the rapid pulse and cold sweats that can set in when you sit down at your computer and discover that some or all of your client data has been lost to a virus or defective backup system.

The good news is that you can avoid this kind of disaster if you invest in the security of a backup system that is professionally installed and maintained. Creating a reliable maintenance and backup policy is crucial to any business, especially one where confidential client data could be compromised or irrecoverably lost. Not only does this offer you peace of mind, it is also a valuable service that you provide to your clients, who may not have a backup system of their own. Protecting their data on your system means that you will never have to make a call that tells them their private or personal information has been lost.

Have you ever tried to process an insurance claim only to find that you don't have adequate coverage? If so, then you understand all too well the need to regularly re-examine your insurance policy and adjust it to cover your future needs. Today's technological landscape is in a constant state of development. If you already have a backup system in place, can you recall the last time you reviewed and tested it? Like any insurance policy, the worst time to review it is when you need it the most. A qualified computer consultant should monitor the ever-expanding culture of computer viruses and software bugs, and should run regular reviews of your network system to ensure it is updated and performing as efficiently as possible.

There are several ways to back up your data, ranging from backing up to tapes, storing your data strictly on an external drive, or remotely backing up your systems. The safest and most popular way to protect your files is to perform a remote backup in conjunction with backup tapes or external drives. The next best option is to use tapes that are then kept offsite.

Your backup policy is determined by the kind of data you wish to protect. The more confidential your information, the more secure the system you would require. Performing a tape backup, for example, involves a tape drive and 10 or more tapes on which to store the data. Some backups perform a complete backup to a new tape every day of the week and then the following week a new set of tapes is used. Each week the tapes are rotated. Other strategies can perform incrementally, first creating a full backup of your files, and then add only new or changed files. This strategy allows more data to be stored on each tape.

The limitation to this backup style is that if you keep your tapes onsite you may lose everything in the event of a fire or other catastrophe at your office. The best way to avoid this is to store a copy of your data tapes offsite. Backups to an external drive can perform much in the same manner as a tape.

The most secure option is to combine tape or external drive backups with offsite backups. This requires internet access and a third party application to be installed onto your system. Each night the backup application will copy your data to the remote location. Another benefit is that this type of system requires no intervention by you to swap tapes.

An important aspect of a successful backup program is monitoring and maintaining it. It is not enough to just set it up and walk away. Log files must be reviewed and updates to the backup program itself are required each time a new version is released. Testing your backup system on a quarterly basis will assure that your logs are accurate as well as reveal any inconsistencies or bugs that may have developed in your software.

The landscape is littered with individuals and companies that failed to put a backup program in place until their data had already been lost. Are you the next statistic? Call a professional to review how your data is protected and what you can do to insure its safe return in the event of a catastrophic system failure.

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