

Computer BackUp

Is it being overlooked at your property?



By Geoff Griswold and Bert McDonold

Backing up computer systems is critical and essential to any company regardless of size, brand or market segment. Loss of front office data would be catastrophic, as would loss of data in the accounting office. A crash with no backup could put a property out of business.

One fact often overlooked is when the computer that encodes guestroom keys fails with no backup, guests have to be escorted to their rooms by hotel personnel and let in with an "E" key. This happened recently in not one, but two Atlanta area hotels. A complete duplicate of a key making computer can be created for as little as \$500 and extra staff to escort guests to their rooms can cost even more than that.

To fully appreciate proper backup procedures, management should be aware of the following items:

Program vs. Data Backup. Programs, such as Microsoft Office or the property management or sales and catering system, generally do not change once they are installed. Though program loss is inconvenient, you can usually recover these programs by re-installing from CD-ROM or downloading it from the Internet. Data, on the other hand, is unique to your organization. Loss of critical data without a proper backup could potentially put you out of business.

Types of Backup Media. Backups can be performed using several different types of media. See the sidebar for examples.

Offsite vs. Onsite backups. It is important to have multiple copies of your data – in multiple locations. If there is fire or theft of your equipment, you need that offsite backup. Even if the backup is a week or a month old it is better than nothing. If you are employing tape or CD/DVD backup, simply take the previous night's backup home with you.

Some Internet services offer over the Internet backup if you have a high-speed connection. Such services allow you to back up your data off-site without the hassle of external media. Iron Mountain at <http://www.connected.com/> is one of the best known, but there are many providers (see <http://www.pcworld.com/reviews/article/0,aid,121970,00.asp>).

Online backup is the up and coming practice for medium to large business and is

becoming reasonable for individuals and small business.

If you have a single copy of your data and the media is somehow defective or it is lost, then you are in real trouble. You need multiple copies of your data. At a minimum, you should have at least five copies of your data (one for each day of the past week). Tape and CD/DVD backup methods have an advantage here, as media is cheap. Online backup providers will also store multiple copies of your data.

Despite your best efforts, your backup may be no good. Backups must be tested. You must test your restore procedure occasionally to determine that you have good backups. Every technician has stories about customers that faithfully changed tapes or CDs every day only to find out the software or hardware failed a long time ago or was never really set up right in the first place.

How important is your data?

Inconvenient if lost but no big deal: Periodically copy your data to another computer over the network or burn a CD/DVD every month.

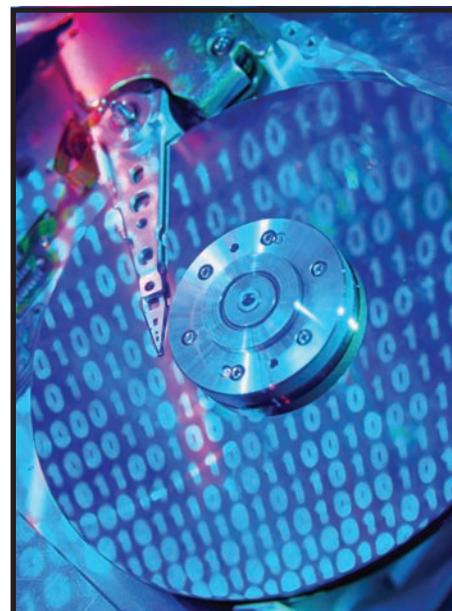
A pretty big deal: You should be looking at CD/DVD-type backups or an external USB hard drive at least once a week.

Critical, such as accounting or database data: You must have multiple types of backups and multiple copies of backups, and should back up every day. For this type of data, it is best to work with a qualified computer technician to establish a formalized plan.

If you are unsure that proper backup systems and procedures are in place at your property, hire a qualified IT backup specialist to review your entire situation.

Do not be put out of business by something that can be easily and affordably corrected.

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Types of BackUp Media

Tape. Back-up to tape using a tape drive is a classic solution to data backup. Tapes are relatively inexpensive, and the backup software included with tape drives is generally adequate for simple backup strategies. However, it can be difficult to determine if the backup is good when a tape solution is employed. Setting up tape backup often requires a professional technician, and the learning curve is higher than other methods.

CD-RW/DVD-RW. This solution involves writing a copy of your data onto a CD or DVD. This solution works well if your data will fit onto the media. Media is very inexpensive, and most CD-RW and DVD-RW drives include backup software.

External USB hard drive. An external hard drive offers large capacity and easy backup, but you are generally limited to one backup copy of your data. This option is great for large amounts of data and backups are created very quickly.

External backup to another computer over the Internet. In this backup scheme, a copy of your data is stored on a backup server via the Internet. This is becoming more used and important – see offsite vs. onsite backups.

Windows Server 2003 Shadow copies. This technology allows recovery of deleted or changed files from a few days to a few months with some limitations. Wonderful for quick recovery of a few deleted files or folders, but does not take the place of a traditional backup scheme. This option requires Windows Server 2003 and professional setup.