

Call for backup

Why off-site backup is so important **Interviewed by Dale W. Hlaves**

Imagine that one or all of your offices are hit by a natural (or unnatural) disaster. Your equipment is lost, including the computers and software that held all of your company's vital information. Could your company survive the setback? How would you minimize the negative impact? How will you ever get your information back?

"It comes down to the old adage that you don't want all of your eggs in one basket," says Chris Hibbs, engineering manager for InsightBusiness. "Whether it's a natural disaster or an unnatural disaster, like somebody sabotaging your offices or stealing your hardware, if all of your stuff is in one spot, you've got a problem because you cannot get your systems back up and running and you've potentially lost all your data. At that point, trying to recreate everything, particularly during a disaster, could be impossible."

Smart Business spoke with Hibbs about how you can prepare your organization to respond to disasters and how to protect yourself from losing important information.

What is the best way to protect your IT information and why should it be done off-site?

Backup systems can be somewhat low tech or extremely high tech — it's all based on how much money your company wants to (or can) spend. Let's start out at the low end. Say your company has all of its financial records, customer lists and ordering systems on a PC or a small server like QuickBooks. The easy thing to do is burn a DVD or a CD, take it home and put it in a safe, and then do a weekly backup of that information or do an incremental backup of the data that's changed. But, when you're in business and your business isn't running your backups back and forth, you tend to forget those things.

There's plenty of software out there that will do automated backups if you have an Internet connection or a point-to-point connection to an off-site facility that has a computer. Once a night, this software will take an incremental snap-



Chris Hibbs
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shot of all your data and park it out on the Web or on an off-site PC.

What if my company is larger and I need a more advanced system?

With larger companies, you are talking about off-site data centers with sophisticated backup systems that send daily, and in some cases up to the minute, database replication over to the data center. Then, if any of the business's facilities goes down at any given moment, the data is back up and running in a matter of 20 or 30 minutes. Hospital groups and large financial groups need security like that. Patient and client records need to be accessible. They can't have a failure and they can't lose information. Therefore, they have to spend a considerable amount of money to be sure that they're always up and running.

Also, regardless of company size, depending on how vital it is to day-to-day business, you may want to consider having a backup Internet service provider. Even if you're very comfortable with your provider, a second provider could protect you even further, at a minimum cost.

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What happens if you have a data issue?

When you're doing an incremental remote backup, that's not a lot of data going back and forth. All you're doing is updating what has changed and you generally have a couple of hours to send that information to your remote. But, say you have to get a hold of all the information that you have and get it back to the main office, because you're trying to rebuild a server or a database that crashed. If you use a standard 100-megabit pipe to your data source when you're pushing your data out, then when you're trying to bring all of that data back in, you probably don't have nearly enough bandwidth.

Having the flexibility to increase that pipe size very quickly is a huge deal. If your normal data consumption is 100 megabits, when you try to rebuild your data it's going to take you about seven hours to pull it all back. But, by increasing the pipe to 1,000 megabits or one gigabit, that same task takes one-tenth of the time.

When you're using all of your bandwidth, you really don't know what your true bandwidth needs are. Ethernet connections have the ability to scale anywhere from 1 megabit to 1,000 megabits. So if you have an 8-megabit connection, you can easily scale it to a 20-megabit connection, and if you peak that, you can easily scale it up to a 50-megabit connection. You can set it to exactly what you want and pay for it accordingly. <<

Information in this article is general in nature. The requirements of each business will vary according to its specific needs.

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