











 LaunchPad.

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DEPARTMENTS:

Updating backup strategies could save you much unwanted trouble

 by [Guest Columnist](#)

A Daily Journal of Commerce guest columnist.

by Dave Johnson

When we talk to clients about the status of their backup strategies, most small- to medium-sized business owners give a glassy-eyed grunt and say that their backups “are fine ...”

Though they are usually more interested in changing the subject, we persist and ask questions that are designed to make them uncomfortable. That’s what they pay us for.

Now is the time to check your backup strategies and test your assumptions of how long you would not have access to your data in an emergency. Why now? Technology has moved at such a rapid pace in the last five years that most users take for granted instant access to information that was only dreamed of by back then.

Whether you are a small business or a large corporation, the risks are the same. While the tools may be different for backing up workstations or servers, the best practices are the same. Here are some basic rules that are easy to follow and will pay back many times over when they are needed.

1. Determine where your data is stored. Many businesses do not have set rules about data storage. Typically, data is all over the place. It does no good if the accounting database resides in the accountant’s “My Documents” folder when that directory is never backed up. Best practices dictate that all “mission critical” information is stored on a centralized system that gets backed up on a regular basis.

2. Determine what backup strategy you are using now. Are you backing up using a tape drive? Good for you. Is it a tape drive that

is three years old and has never been cleaned? Using the same tapes that you got with the tape drive? Bad for you.

Tape is great, but there are other, perhaps better options available that were not around even a year ago. One solution is an external hard drive that connects to a workstation, laptop and servers using a Universal Serial Bus Connection, also known as a USB. These inexpensive drives (about \$199 for 120 Gigabytes) are very fast, easy to use and can be shared among numerous systems in a small office if cost is an issue. They make a great primary backup for workstations and a lifesaving secondary backup for servers or other mission-critical systems.

3. Check your frequency. How often are you backing up? The window of acceptable downtime is closing all of the time, and many businesses are still backing up only weekly. Ask yourself if having only last Friday's data to work with this Friday is OK by you. Most would say not. The good news is that most workstation and server software since Windows 98 have built-in backup software that is easy to use, and most can be automated to backup on a regular, hands-off basis.

4. Check your backed up-data. This is the gotcha that most people overlook. Determine that the backup is not only running, but that the information can be quickly, easily and reliably retrieved as soon as it is needed. Those who do not risk an error message that says that there is a media failure and that the restore cannot continue. No less frequently than once per month, select some files at random to restore. Open the restored files and check the contents. It goes without saying that problems are best found during one of these dry runs.

More can be said on this subject – think about issues like fires, theft and long-term power outages. If you are still not convinced, try this test. Come in to work on Monday morning and do not use your computer until you come in to work on Wednesday morning. See how it feels to be without your data, and plan accordingly.

Dave Johnson is the President of Netropole Inc., a Portland, Ore. software development, network integration and support company that uses Microsoft technology for its solutions. Johnson sleeps very well at night knowing that his systems are backed up using both tapes and hard drives. For more information, call (503) 241-3499 or visit www.netropole.com.

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