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Losing (data) is not an option

DATA IS ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ASSETS IN ANY BUSINESS. HAVING A BACK-UP PLAN AND STRATEGY IN PLACE SHOULD BE HIGH UP ON A COMPANY'S PRIORITY LIST. MAEVE McGOVERN REPORTS

**'THE MAIN CAUSE OF DATA
BEING WIPED OUT IS
THROUGH HUMAN ERROR, WHERE FILES
ARE INADVERTENTLY DELETED'**

'AS BUDGETS ARE NOW TIGHTER IN MOST COMPANIES, LOSING WEEKS AND POSSIBLY MONTHS' WORTH OF DATA COULD PROVE COSTLY'

Backing up your data

is one of the most important areas of your business, yet can often be neglected. Without a back-up plan in place, a business can risk losing company data that cannot be retrieved.

Systems are at risk from all kinds of things such as virus attacks, human error, power surges, theft or fire, so it is recommended that owner managers draw up a back-up plan that will secure their critical information.

So why is it so important for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to back up data? Loss of data is irreplaceable, according to Eoin Blacklock of KeepITsafe.ie, which specialises in online data back-up. "Every SME spends time inputting data into computers, for accounts, payroll and customers. All the data stored on it is vital to the company. SMEs usually offer professional services to a wide customer base and hold extremely confidential and valuable information for their clients."

Company data is not being held in high enough regard, given that the likelihood of your hard drive failing is really high, he says. "If there's one thing inevitable about a PC that's five or six years old, it's that the hard drive is going to fail. There's a 6pc chance in any given year that this will happen. Companies have been known to lose six months of work after hard-drive failure. The loss costs weeks of catching up. Also, there are implications under the Data Protection Act if you lose all your tax and revenue records.

"We came across accountants who lost a couple of months' data and the only way around that for them was to work late into the night, every night, for a whole month, literally typing it all in again. And none of this work was billable.

"Doctors who, for example, might have gone paperless in the past three or four years are now in a situation whereby if they have a server crash they could lose the last few years of their customers' records."

The main cause of data being wiped out is through human error, where files are inadvertently deleted. With the 'enter' button sitting right next to the 'delete' button, this happens more than people realise, according to Blacklock.

"On a PC, if you delete a file, it goes into a recycle bin. However,

when you delete a file from the network or server it doesn't go into a recycle bin — it's just gone. But people don't always realise that a particular file has been deleted for a few weeks or even a few months afterwards."

Owner managers invest heavily in staff, IT equipment and office furniture, but often do not have a process in place to keep their data secure, says Blacklock. "The most prominent reason for this is the lack of awareness of alternative options outside of the traditional tape back-up method and, secondly, due to a lack of time."

ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

In the current business climate, how essential is it to back up? "What we're seeing, particularly in large organisations, is a case of IT managers being let go. As a result, responsibility for back-up can fall by the wayside," explains Blacklock.

"As budgets are now tighter in most companies, losing weeks and possibly months' worth of data could prove costly for businesses. Most often cutbacks appear in staff reductions, which, in turn, leaves less staff available to conduct a manual tape back-up, and an increase workload for remaining staff members."

A familiar scenario that Blacklock says he has come across is as follows: a long-term employee is not happy with your decision to let them go and decides to delete a few 'critical' files on their last day. There have also been cases of employees copying large amounts of data onto disks, with the hope of taking them offsite.

To counteract this, he recommends having an insurance programme for data and ensuring a back-up plan is in place.

Blacklock explains that online back-up technology has come a long way over the past five years. Security and data protection now allow providers to back up 24/7, with the ability to recover files instantaneously. The growth of data centers, such as Digiweb, based in Blanchardstown, has also given online back-up suppliers access to cutting-edge facilities that can house their back-up data files.



Eoin Blacklock

A number of options exist for data back-up. These are:

■ DVD back-up

DVD back-up is a practical alternative for small businesses and a suitable option for storing medium amounts of back-up data. Such technologies include DVD-RW, DVD+RW, DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RAM, as well as dual layer DVD technologies. Single-layer DVDs can hold up to 4.7GB of data and dual-layer DVDs can hold up to 8.5GB.

■ Online storage

This is one of the newest methods of storing your files and back-up data. Online solutions allow businesses to upload their data to a reliable server, located in a secure environment. Another plus to storing files online is that users can access these files from anywhere as long as they have internet access.

■ Tape back-up

Tape back-ups have become less popular, but still remain the primary back-up method used in business environments. Tape back-ups are available in numerous capacities such as 4mm helical for low-end systems; 8mm helical scan technology for mid-range systems; and AIT, DLT and LTO for high-end systems. Compared to several other media solutions, tape drives typically provide the highest storage capacities at the lowest cost. One drawback is the write speed of these drives, which is comparatively low.

■ Hard drives

Hard drives are becoming a more attractive option for businesses, due to their falling price. Copying and retrieving data from separate hard drives is very easy. The primary disadvantages are cost and the worry that a malware attack, which affects the primary hard drives, could also affect the back-up of hard drives.

DATA COMPLIANCE — YOUR OBLIGATIONS

Legal compliance is an aspect that cannot be overlooked by management when installing an IT system and putting in place a back-up solution. All management has a legal obligation to comply with relevant legislation and install the necessary procedures, policy and monitoring to ensure compliance.

What is data protection?

It is the safeguarding of the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of personal data. The Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003 confer rights on individuals as well as responsibilities on those persons processing personal data.

The consequences of non-compliance

1. Inspection by the data protection commissioner
2. Public naming of persons convicted
3. Conviction with a fine of up to €100,000
4. Susceptible to:
 - Client data loss in event of a disaster such as server failure, water damage or fire
 - Confidential data disclosure because of staff or non-secure procedures
 - Accusations of negligence around data protection.