

# Safe keeping

## UNDER THE RADAR

### Eoin Blacklock, KeepITsafe

INTERVIEW: PETER CLUSKEY

DATA SECURITY should be a priority for any company that stores confidential client information, but the sad fact is that far too few are being as careful as they should – often because they simply don't have the expertise.

"A lot of companies still back up their systems on to tape and think of it simply as an administrative job, without realising the confidentiality implications," says Eoin Blacklock (26), managing director of Ireland's largest online back-up provider, KeepITsafe.

"The back-up tapes should be stored off-site and, in fairness, most companies do that. But you'll often find that a designated person brings them home and keeps them in a cupboard without any kind of security, totally unencrypted."

He knows people who have lost their tapes or had the bags in which they were carried stolen.

Another problem is that hard drives invariably fail – for Blacklock, that joins death and taxes in the short list of things in life that are guaranteed.

"When you buy a hard drive, it will actually tell you the 'mean time between faults' for that product. In terms of reliability, laptops are worst; desktops come next and

then servers, though it depends on the cost of the drive you buy.

"In recent years you've had doctors' surgeries, for instance, going paperless and putting patients' details and medical records on to computer – completely unaware that statistically, I believe, there's a 6 per cent chance every year that the drive will fail and everything will be lost if it's not backed up."

KeepITsafe, Blacklock tells his prospective clients, solves both those problems. "Firstly, there are no tapes because our system is online. And in any case Windows Server 2008 doesn't support tape back-up, which is going to be a massive boost for our business."

"Essentially, our software sits on your server and backs up several times a day. Unlike some other systems, ours is fully managed, which means it's monitored constantly and, if there's a problem, the customer is alerted immediately."

"We have people who ask us if all their data is going to be out there on the web because our system is online. The answer is that it's going directly to our servers in Blanchardstown through what is called an SSL tunnel, a secure line – and in any case the data is encrypted on the clients' side before it's transferred to our server. So there are two separate levels of security."

KeepITsafe had a turnover of €600,000 in 2007, growing to €800,000 in 2008, with €1 million anticipated for 2009. Its clients now include Eircom, recruitment firm CPL Europe, the Irish Rugby Football Union, the Office of Public Works, the Health Service Executive, the Law Society and j2 Global, one of *Fortune* magazine's "coolest companies".

Blacklock admits that its development since he and his business partner, Jonathan Crowe, first set it up as a programming project while studying computer science

## ON THE RECORD



Name: Eoin Blacklock

Company: KeepITsafe  
www.keepitsafe.ie

Job: managing director

Age: 26

Background: keepITsafe began in 2003 as a programming project while Blacklock and his business partner, Jonathan Crowe (26), were studying computer science at TCD. Both graduated with firsts in 2005, then registered the company.

Blacklock became MD and Crowe technical director. They now have more than 1,000 clients and 100 IT partners and, despite the downturn, the company is on target for turnover of €1 million

at TCD has been largely unplanned.

"We must be one of the few companies that exceeded start-up expectations. We only needed one server and 30 customers to get going and, when we left Trinity in 2005, we were close to 50, we had working capital and cash flow built up. It was very scalable. Still, we

for 2009.

Inspired by: "Although I have a technical background, I love the world of business, so I'd have to say Michael O'Leary – because he runs Ryanair so efficiently and so effectively in business terms."

"As well as that, he constantly uses the power of the media to promote the company."

Challenges: Convincing companies that they need to back up their hard drives.

"Initially we thought we'd be dealing only with SMEs with two or three computers. We didn't realise there were so many large corporates that didn't have proper back-up solutions in place, and that our system could provide what they needed. But companies are becoming more aware – and that's a challenge for us too."

Most important thing learned so far: "Be honest with your customers from day one. Explain to them what you can do and what you cannot do."

"There are a lot of companies who exaggerate and make extravagant promises and when they can't live up to their promises, those relationships are damaged."

didn't think that Eircom would ever be using our back-up."

Typically for a tech company, KeepITsafe remains small in staff terms, with five full-time and two part-time – although it is currently bucking the economic trend by hiring two IT support staff.

petercluskey@yahoo.fr