

Are You Ready for the Next Disaster?

Small and medium sized firms are just as vulnerable to disasters as large firms.

Recently, there was an 8.0 earthquake in Peru, a major typhoon in China and raging forest fires continue to burn in Greece. All around the world not a month goes by without something catastrophic happening. The question is not if, but when, something major will happen in Toronto.

We have had our share of problems in the past with SARS, West Nile and the like, but what if there was an emergency that damaged buildings in the down town core or made it impossible to access the office - would your firm be prepared? Would it survive?

Disaster Recovery - more recently called Business Continuity - is just as important for small and medium sized firms as it is for large firms. The list of areas that need to be looked at to form a complete business continuity plan are numerous making the task of getting prepared unwieldy for most small and medium sized firms. But, as with any large endeavour, it can be tackled one step at a time.

The article focuses on one aspect of technology - backup - which small and medium sized firms can employ to protect one of the most valuable assets - its data. We recommend three kinds of back up to protect the firm from any type of disaster.

Tape Backup - Tape backup provides a reliable, easily understood and long term storage medium for backup. With the appropriate backup schedule, data can be accessed from tape for up to a year from the original backup date. Thereafter, the tape is reused to repeat the cycle. Tapes can be taken off site and physically labelled making it easy to recover data at a specific moment in time. Don't underestimate the tactile nature of tape - it makes it very easy for none technical people to find what they need.

When considering tape, not all tapes drives are created equal. We find that Linear Tape Option (LTO) drives work the best for reliability, capacity and speed. Consider replacing older technologies with high capacity LTO1 (100GB), LTO2 (200GB) or LTO3 (400GB) tape drives.

Disk Backup - A disk backup system takes a snapshot of your server and places that snapshot onto a removable hard disk. Snapshot technology has the benefit of capturing all of the settings for the operating system and data on the server. A snapshot is essentially a record of the exact state of a server at a moment in time. That same snapshot can be used to quickly rebuild a server to the same moment in

time as the original snapshot in much less time than it would take to recover from any other technology.

We suggest a portable backup disk so that it can be removed in the event that an problem is known or suspected ahead of time. In fact, some firms choose to use two removable disks, always leaving one off site. Snapshots can also be backed up to tape for double protection. Snapshots are meant for the quick recovery of a downed server.

Online Backup - Online backup programs copy all documents from a firm's server(s) to an off site, secure facility run by an outsourced company specializing in backup. Only documents, databases and files associated with 'data' are backed up. Programs, system files and other types of information are not backed up to minimize the amount of data stored off site. This reduces the overall cost of an online backup systems.

In the event of a sudden disaster that eliminates the possibility of accessing the firm's servers, data can be restored from the online backup system over the Internet or the outsourced company can ship a hard disk (or NAS device - basically a large capacity disk that can be plugged directly into the network) containing the data to the desired location.

Conclusion - Small and medium sized firms can invest in backup technologies as a first step in the process of creating a business continuity plan. The combination of tape, disk and online backup create a foolproof method of recovering data no matter what the cause.

Charles Bennett is the Principal Consultant of Triella, a technology consulting company specializing in providing technology audits, planning advice, project management and other CIO related services to small and medium sized firms. He can be reached at cbennett@triella.com or 647.426.1004. For additional articles, go to <http://www.triella.com/publications.html>.

© 2007, by Triella Corp. All rights reserved.