

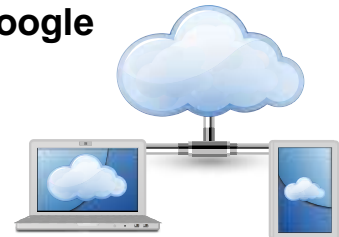
In This Months TechPoints

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Some of the Drawbacks of Services like Dropbox, Google Drive and Microsoft's OneDrive

By Dan Ayars, Marketing Coordinator, TechSolutions

Accessibility is one of the driving forces in today's technology. Technology as a whole continues to move in the direction of making everything accessible to anyone, anytime, anywhere, on any device. Furthermore, seamless interaction with technology is highly desirable for most people. So not surprisingly, consumer cloud storage and file sharing services like Dropbox and Google Drive have become very popular in this everything, all-the-time world. Unfortunately though, security and critical features take a back seat in these consumer oriented services that result in disadvantages, especially when used in a business environment. Let's take a look at some of the drawbacks of these services so you can see that this may not be the best option for business document sharing and storage.



Encryption is inadequate

Encryption, in simplistic terms, is the process of converting data into a secret code in such a way that only those authorized to do so can read it. A public key (a long string of letters and numbers) is used to encrypt or lock the data and a private key is used to decrypt or unlock the data. Services like Dropbox are hosted publicly, meaning that everyone shares the same public encryption key; when that encryption key is compromised, your businesses' documents, your clients' documents, and your personal documents will be vulnerable. This happened with Dropbox in August, 2012, when users had their logins and passwords stolen. Scenarios such as this can be avoided by using a storage service that only makes the encryption key available exclusively to the client.

Some services like Google Drive don't encrypt data. Others like Dropbox have limited encryption leaving your documents vulnerable to unauthorized access. In April 2014 it was reported that Intralinks, a file sharing company, accidentally gained the ability to access the confidential documents of other businesses and people. Intralinks was analyzing its Google Adwords campaign data and discovered it contained links to the sensitive documents being stored on Dropbox and Box.com.

In addition, data in transit over the internet is not automatically encrypted by these services. So businesses who use these services could be taking a huge risk in moving documents back and forth over the internet.

It's not surprising that a Bloomberg BusinessWeek [article](#) states that several file-sharing services including Dropbox have been included on the list of employers Top 10 Blacklisted Apps.

File retention and locking

Consumer cloud products perform file trimming -- that means that your deleted files are preserved for a very limited amount of time. If an employee accidentally (or purposely) deletes a file, it will be gone in a matter of weeks, or even days. So do you bet on human nature, intentional or not, or play it safe by using a business grade service that allows you to restore deleted files or previous versions from as far back as you need.

The ability to lock files that are being shared by several users is imperative if you want to avoid having multiple versions of a file and getting stuck trying to figure out what edits and versions to use. Dropbox doesn't offer this option which is certainly a shortcoming for a service built on the primary purpose of file sharing.

Granular user-access and security controls

At the foundation of most business networks security is access. Permissions are instituted to enable control over which person or group has access to what files and folders. I can't think of a client we work with who doesn't have some form of these controls in place. In most cases it would be ill-advised to not have these restrictions in place due to reasons that should be quite obvious. So it would not be prudent to circumvent those security measures by using a file sharing service, like Dropbox, that does not offer the ability to control access to files and folders.

These are some of the more important things to consider when selecting a file sharing service. There are additional useful features contained within a good business file sharing service. Two features for example are the ability to remotely wipe computers and mobile devices, for instance when an employee is terminated. Or the ability to monitor files you've shared internally or externally and track downloads of those files.

Through research or by contacting us, you can learn the plusses and minuses of the various services. One option to consider is the file sharing service we offer called TechSolutions PointCare Sync. Beyond the fact that PointCare Sync contains all the necessary and useful features mentioned above, plus more, is the real big advantage of our expertise. We conduct extensive due diligence to ensure that the services provided by TechSolutions, like PointCare Sync, will perform as expected, before making them available to our clients. Regardless, the bottom line is to investigate, learn and make sure you are not placing your documents and business at unnecessary risk.



5 Tips to Effective DR Plans

As a business owner you must be constantly aware of threats to your business. One of the best ways to mitigate many of these dangers is to develop and implement a Disaster Recovery Plan. In order to help ensure that your business is ready to recover from any disaster, here are five real-world tips that can help see you through.

1. Have a full copy of your data backed up outside of your operating region

Almost every company, regardless of size, has backup measures in place. These backups can be either physical or digital, and are supposed to be carried out on a regular basis. If a disaster strikes, having access to your data can help ensure that you can recover your systems and resume operations in the minimal amount of time.

While backups are great, if you keep your backups in the same area as your main systems, or even if your offsite backups are in the same region, there is a chance that a large disaster, like a flood, or power outage, could also affect these backups too. One of the best solutions is to keep a current backup offsite,

and outside of your operating region, with most experts recommending at least 150 miles away from your main business area.

How do you achieve this? The best option is to use cloud-backup. Many providers host their backup service at a number of different data centers in various locations, so that should a disaster strike both your business and a nearby data center, your data is still safe at other centers.

2. Realistically test your plan

It can be tempting to simply develop a plan and then test it in a closed environment once or twice a year, make some changes where necessary and then sit back and hope it works. In truth, for any plan to really be effective it needs to be tested in a realistic environment. If this is not carried out then there is a possibility that the plan could fail when activated.

Because disasters come in almost any form and size, you are going to want to first identify as many potential problems as possible. From here, test your recovery plans based on these scenarios and see how effective they are. Be sure to also involve your colleagues and employees, as they too will need to know what to do when disaster strikes and what their role in the recovery of data is.

A good way to look at these tests is to think of them more as practice runs. As with anything, the more you practice the easier and more effective it becomes. In this case, good practice could literally save your business.

3. Update your plan as you update your systems

When you develop a recovery plan, you need to base it on the systems and technology you currently have in your business. However, these systems and devices may not be in use six months, to a year from now, or you may introduce new systems and improvements.

As soon as you make any changes, your existing recovery plan could become obsolete. Therefore, you need to ensure that when you introduce new systems or technology you are also updating the recovery plan to cover and fit with these changes.

4. Create an accessible plan

Many experts agree that having a physical plan that employees can see and access during a disaster is one of the best ways of ensuring that it is actually implemented properly. Therefore, when you develop a Disaster Recovery Plan make sure that all of your employees can access it at any time. This includes during and immediately following a disaster.

Beyond this, you need to make sure that the plan is consistent. If you update the master plan, but fail to update the copies you store in say a public cloud, or at different worksites, this will lead to confusion and even an increased recovery time or complete recovery failure. When you do update your plan, let all parties involved know that it has been updated and remind them where they can find copies of the plan.

5. Don't be the only fully-trained disaster recovery expert in your company

As a business owner or manager it can be easy to try and run everything yourself. After all, it is your business and you know exactly how to look after everything, right? The problem is that if you are the only fully-trained disaster recovery person you are making yourself the weakest link in the plan.

We have the experience here at TechSolutions to review or assist with setting up your plan. So contact us if you would like more details or to discuss it further



Using the New Search Folder in Outlook

Microsoft Outlook is an application included in the Microsoft Office Suite. While it's most commonly used to access different email accounts e.g., personal and business, it also has other features, including calendar, contacts, and tasks. In addition, it comes with a search folder that lets you instantly find messages that fall under certain criteria.

Outlook is one of the most popular email platforms allowing you to read emails from almost any email account. The inbox is where the majority of your interaction with Outlook takes place, but the problem is that many users receive so many emails that they can be overwhelmed quickly. This makes it more difficult to find or separate the important emails.

One way to deal with this is by creating a customized search folder for important emails. This makes searching for and storing of vital messages easier as they are saved in a separate folder.

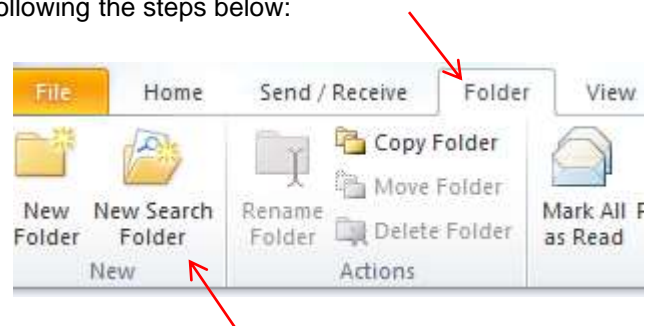
Default and predefined search folders in Outlook

There are three default search folders in Outlook and you can see them under "Search Folders" in the mail navigation pane on the left side of the window. These default search folders are Categorized Mail, Large Mail and Unread Mail. Categorized Mail contains messages that are categorized by color. The Large Mail folder is a search folder that includes messages that are over 100 KB in size. Unread Mail, as the term suggests, contains emails that have not yet been read.

Predefined search folders are also available. These are existing search folders that you can add to the search menu, below the other folders. Some of these require that you enter specific criteria, while others do not. For instance, "Mail flagged for follow up" does not require any criteria, while "Mail with specific words" asks you to enter certain words that the message must contain to be included in the folder.

Adding predefined search folders can be done by following the steps below:

1. At the top of the Outlook screen go to the **Folder** tab and select **New Search Folder**. The New Search Folder window will appear.
2. Click on any of the predefined search folders.
3. Select the option you want if asked for a specific criterion.
4. Click OK.



Create a new search folder in Outlook

It's also possible to create your very own search folder. You get to set not only the criteria, but its name as well. This makes it convenient to easily access important messages as you don't have to browse through the inbox or various folders in your mailbox.

Here's how to create a new search folder in Outlook:

1. Access **New Search Folder** as you did in step 1 above.
2. Click **Create a custom Search Folder** followed by **Choose**.
3. Enter the name of the new folder in the name field.
4. Click **Criteria** and set your preferences to further personalize the folder and click OK.
5. Click **Browse** and select folders to add in your customized search folder, then click OK.

6. Select OK on the new search folder window, the new folder you created will be added under your search folders and messages that meet the criteria will start populating the folder.

Messages in search folders will still remain in the original folders where they are saved. Even if you view the messages and delete the search folder, the messages will still be accessible in their default folder. However, if you select and delete a message in a search folder, it will be completely removed, even from its original folder.

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Better Emails with the PAR Structure

Email has become the main form of communication for many businesses. When first launched, many people treated email as simply an electronic version of company memos and letters and therefore created and styled them as such. Over time, email has become much more informal, and while this is great it can lead to problems in overall clarity of communication. However, there is one effective way you can ensure all of your messages are clear and understandable, by adopting PAR.



Better email structure for small businesses

In order for your emails to be clearer and to get the overall message across easily, you might want to implement a PAR structure. This three part framework has been used by many business owners and managers to improve overall communications, and consists of:

Problem

At the very top of the email, below the salutation, provide a brief yet clear overview of the problem which is the subject of the email or the reason you are making contact. When writing this overview don't assume anything, including shared knowledge or agreements, unless you have discussed these with all recipients beforehand. The key here is that you are looking to be able to summarize the main issue.

If you need more than two paragraphs, then you should probably create a longer form report that is attached in the email. The reason for this is because the vast majority of people will simply scan an email, and if it's too long, they will usually skip it, or possibly miss key points. If it is easy to scan and read, then there is a greater chance all parties will be on the same page.

Beyond this, if you are struggling to come up with a short explanation or can't clearly summarize the problem in writing, then email may not be the best medium to be using. Opt instead for a meeting or phone call to discuss the issue more fully.

Action

After stating what the problem is, clearly mark any proposed actions or recommendations using a relevant heading, then specifically lay them out in an easy to read format. You want to be as specific as possible here, ensuring that all parties understand what you want to happen and the actions they will need to take as a result.

For example, if you use vague language, such as: "I need this by the end of the month", people may only carry out what you are asking for on the very last day of the month. Instead, you might be better to give a specific delivery date, and possibly a set time, so that any deadlines are clearly defined. Bulleted and numbered lists can really help here, as long as they are clear and understandable and don't muddle the issue.

Results

Finally, identify the expected results based on the actions you want the recipients to take. This helps ensure that every recipient knows what they should be striving for, as well as serving as an indicator of whether the problem has been specifically solved or not.

If the results aren't met, you have a good opportunity to look back at the process and see if there is any room for improvement, or try to pinpoint exactly why something went wrong or didn't happen as you planned. This in turn, if leveraged correctly, can help improve overall productivity.

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