Backing up data helps businesses sidestep disasters

Such initiatives protect operations and can recover data when needed

By DEBBIE WALTZER

Just a few weeks ago, Capstone Information Technologies Inc. handled a distress call from an administrator at a local non-profit agency.

The undisclosed organization had lost the hard drive on its main file server, and the staff had not performed routine computer backup procedures, recalls Michael Fowler, president of Capstone, which offers computer support services to small businesses and non-profits, including Butler/Till Media Services Inc., Seneca Financial Advisors and the Monroe County Bar Association.

As a result, the 25-person social service agency "was down for four days—no invoices, no transactions—and they didn't recover much of their data," Fowler says.

This situation is common, he says.

"We hear dozens of similar horror stories in any given year, but they're all the same scenario—no backup," Fowler says. "Our message is simple: Backing up data is the single most important thing you can do to safeguard your business."

It is challenging for companies to recover from IT disasters. Significant data can be lost—either temporarily or permanently—and company executives must exercise patience while IT experts diagnose and then fix problems. Productivity and morale can suffer, as well.

Tech experts say many companies that suffer sizable data losses do not survive. Fowler and other local information technology consultants say a major data loss is something no business can afford.

"It's important to back up data and verify that the data is accurate and complete, while storing it off-site," Fowler says.

Capstone's clients typically perform a two-step backup procedure, he adds. First, the client performs a complete backup on site. Then it uses an automated procedure to store data at a remote online site. In Capstone's case, these backup facilities are in Maryland and Utah.

"Bottom line: We want an extra copy of your data on-site as well as off-site," Fowler stresses.

Mihai Vieru, president and CEO of LMT Technology Solutions, agrees with this approach. Founded in 1993, LMT is an 18-employee company that provides outsourced IT services to small and midsize businesses in the Rochester area. Clients include Trident Precision Manufacturing, Hickey-Freeman Co. Inc., Vett Corp. and Pluta Cancer Center.

"Backup of data is critical to organizations for three primary reasons: to protect operations, aid in disaster recovery and serve as a means for archiving data," Vieru says.

Roughly four years ago, a logistics company approached LMT. The undisclosed firm had lost six months' worth of data because a previous IT services provider did not have a backup policy. Vieru and his co-workers guided the supply chain services company through a laborious process of recreating their data from paper. Some information, however, was lost forever. Immediately, the logistics company hired LMT to provide an off-site data backup service, Vieru says.

"Disaster recovery is essential to any enterprise," Vieru notes. "If your business is struck by hardware server crashes, then having an off-site backup procedure can enable you to get back up and running again in a fairly timely fashion."

Vieru sees a disparity in companies' awareness of the importance of backing up data.

"Small and midsize businesses with annual revenues of $3 million to $20 million typically understand the need for backing up data," he says. "But we often work with smaller businesses that either have no backup system or erroneously think that they do. Our job is to provide a safe and reliable service for them."

Like Fowler, Vieru says the stakes are extremely high.

"The danger of neglecting to conduct ongoing, off-site backup is significant; in essence, it can wipe out a business," Vieru states.

Matthew Chesterton, president and owner of Off Site Data Sync Inc., a data backup and recovery service company that operates from the Medical Arts Building, advises his clients accordingly.

"We get calls on a daily basis from small and midsize organizations regarding files that were lost, often due to power outages," he says. "While big disasters are uncommon, it is not unusual for a remote user to struggle with losing files on a notebook and needing to recover the data quickly."

Chesterton's company operates an off-site data center in Gates and charges clients a monthly fee per gigabyte, as well as a monthly fee for a server, if the client needs it. The company also uses a remote location in Philadelphia.

Off Site Data, with eight full-time and two part-time employees, reached $2 million in revenue during 2009. Chesterton expects that figure to climb by 40 percent in 2010. Clients include law firms, medical offices, surgical centers and software developers.

"We focus on the enterprise market," says Chesterton, who opened his company in 2005. "Typically, our clients are looking to save money. With our help, they don't have to conduct the cumbersome task of taking out tape backups, labeling them and calling another company to come pick them up.

"With us, the process is automatic. Once a customer experiences a data failure, they really prefer to use our data center."

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