

By Willy Campbell

Devise a Backup Plan for Your Business Data

Everyone knows that backing up computer files is important and most of us will face a computer crisis of some type sooner or later. But simple laziness, or perhaps a lack of information and belief that backups are too complicated or too costly or too time-consuming cause business owners to put it off. That can have disastrous consequences!

Damaged or lost files have cost many small or home-based businesses weeks, months or even years of work. It can happen in an instant, for many reasons. Suddenly your hard drive starts making loud grinding noises and stops working. Your laptop might be stolen or maybe you push a wrong button. You have not kept your anti-virus software up to date and a nasty virus wipes out your files. This is one area where the bad things that can happen often do happen – and the pain is almost physical.

Technological dangers are common and you must be prepared to avoid them. Having backup files available in the event of trouble can be the difference between staying open or having to shut down. The mantra is: ARCHIVE! ARCHIVE! ARCHIVE!

There are several ways to backup your business files. One simple method is to copy or “burn” your files to CDs or to “sticks” that plug into your USB port. Using the stick at the end of the day or the week is terrifically simple and effective. This method works if you don’t have large amounts of data to protect. You also can keep a secondary computer or external hard drive around to serve as your backup center.

Another option is to use a service that lets you back up your data over the internet. Depending on the amount and type of data you need to save, you can use any one method or a combination. The key is to make certain that at least one set of files is kept in another secure location.

It helps to have a specific plan in place to protect your files. First, decide which files are critical to keeping your business operating. Then choose a backup method and perform a full backup at least once a week. Backup any critical data daily to a removable device. To make sure the backup systems really work, test your backup files at least quarterly. Keep a full backup on site for convenience, but be sure to store one set far enough away so a disaster won’t strike both locations.

Imation is a top supplier of backup hardware, also called “removable data storage media”, and has one of the broadest product lines in the field. The firm’s web site at www.imation.com has a section devoted to “Small and Medium Size Business” with helpful tips, advice and product information to get you started. Symantec at www.smallbiz.symantec.com also offers backup solutions designed for small business. A

“new” approach to backup is “cloud computing” which should be investigated courtesy of Google.

To plug yourself into other technology solutions for your small business, contact the Sandhills Chapter of SCORE “Counselors to America’s Small Business”. SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit association of expert business counselors who provide free and confidential business counseling to small business owners. The Sandhills Chapter is very active in counseling, mentoring and presenting free business seminars. It is currently expanding these activities and is seeking motivated volunteers. You can reach the Chapter via the web at www.sandhillsscore.org or at 910-692-3926. In addition the SCORE office in the Chamber of Commerce building is open 10am – 12 every Tuesday.

Remember – send your business questions to me at www.contact@sandhillsscore.org and don’t forget to provide a way to contact you. I may not be able to answer all of them in this column but every one will receive a personal answer from one of our Sandhills SCORE counselors!