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Is Backing Up Your Data Worth a Lifetime Supply of FREE Beer?



A Report on Best Practices for Backing up Your Computer Data
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I spotted an interesting story on a news website recently. A New Zealand brewery recently had a laptop stolen. The laptop itself is of little value, but the contact details, financial data and designs held on the laptop were critical to their business. The cost of replacing this data is so high they have offered a lifetime supply of free beer for the return of the data!

There is a serious side to this story. It graphically illustrates the value of data help on PC's and networks today. Many people undervalue the importance of the data we have and how difficult it is to replace.

So here is our 7-step data security checklist for your computer network:

1. **Is the data being backed up by a specialized piece of software?** Backup software programs like Australia's own "BackupAssist" allows you to specify exactly what folders and files should be backed up *every time* and allows you to schedule the process to run on a regular automatic process. It also emails you a report every time it finishes for added piece of mind that it actually worked.

More sophisticated backup software solutions for networks like Symantec BackupExec allow you to take "snapshots" throughout the day so that potential data loss is further reduced.

2. **Do you know which data is critical to you?** We are amazed how often a check of what is being backed up reveals that critical files like MYOB data and emails have been "unticked" from a backup process.

When did you last sit down and review with a full understanding of your system's file structure what data needs to be backed up?

3. **What type of media are you backing up to?** Firstly, we think CDs and DVDs are out – they're too slow, they've got a low capacity, they're hard to track and catalogue, and they're not secure (basically any PC in the world can read a CD). And external hard drives suffer most of these drawbacks too.

What we do like are devices that have data cartridges that pop out, making them easy to swap over, catalogue and store securely. Magnetic tapes have been used by companies

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large and small for decades and we still think they're a great solution due to their large capacity, simplicity and cost-competiveness.

Newer removeable disk media like the Iomega REV drives are very good if you have modest backup requirements (less than 70Gb), as they are well priced, fast and reliable. Backing up across the internet to a third party provider is an option too – but not one we think is very practical in Australia, for now anyway, because of our relatively slow internet speeds and the high cost of data transfer. Maybe one day...

4. **What type of backup schedule and media rotation policy are you using?** We recommend that your critical data be backed up every single work day using some form of media rotation policy.

Besides limiting your maximum data loss to only one day, this also allows you to minimize the impact of human error (like having to restore important customer files that were accidentally deleted by a staff member, who only discovered their mistake three days later).

There are many different media rotation strategies – too many to cover off here – but at the VERY LEAST, you need five tapes or disks, labelled Monday through Friday.

5. **Is the backup taken off-site?** There is little point in backing up from one drive to another, or backing up to a tape drive and leaving it in the office every night. All this does is protect you from a hard drive failure, not a disaster.

This may seem low-risk “as it will never happen to you”, but over the 18 years we've been in business, we know of clients who have suffered storm damage, major hardware malfunctions, theft and in case, their factory burnt to the ground. Most of our clients ensure that somebody takes the day's backup media home each and every night.

The other option that some of our clients use (especially if they have audit requirements) is to use a third party service like VaultCentral to collect and return backup media on a regular and secure cycle.

6. **Always do full backups!** In the 21st Century, there is no excuse for a partial (or incremental) backup. With anything other than a full backup, a disaster recovery requires that you rely on more than one media/backup job combination.

And Murphy's Law is the last thing you want to have happen at such a critical time!

7. **Have you tested your backup?** Just about everybody thinks that their backup is working without ever testing it. Unfortunately a lot of backups that we come across either back up the wrong data or none at all!

Or the same set of tapes has been used for years, and the data on it has been over-written so many times, its not readable. Doing a test restore at least every three months is essential.



Best Practice Procedures for a Backup Solution

1. Have a Backup Log

Make two or three copies of the Backup Log sheet (before you use it) and put them in front of a special A4 size folder that is reserved for information on your computer system. As you will be taking tapes off-site regularly, and taking monthly tapes offsite permanently, you don't need to keep a lot of old log sheets around.

While most good commercial network backup software (like our preferred product, Backup Exec) keeps great catalogs of what's on each tape, it is often very hard to look at their log to see which tape was used last Thursday or on the last day of the month. With a paper log, you just look and there it is!

It is also a task-oriented form that increases the chances that someone will actually change the tape! Remember, this is one of the big two problem areas!

When you clean the tape, restore a file, or do any maintenance on the backup, make a note on the form. Again, this makes it easy to tell what is going on. You never know when one odd thing will become merely the first in a string of problems that point to a larger problem with the backup. The more notes you have right in front of you, the easier it will be to begin troubleshooting.

We have a sample Backup Log sheet available in both Word and PDF format. If you'd like a free copy, let us know via the Contact Us page on our website (www.netcare.net.au).

2. Have a tape rotation policy

There are many different tape rotation policies. The most important thing is to have one and stick to it!

Here's the method we recommend to clients that have a computer system that comprises up to 3 servers with less than 75 users:

- Tapes are labeled 001, 002, 003 etc. If you move to a new generation of tapes, label them 1001, 1002, 1003 etc. Keep about 10 in circulation.
- Use tapes in order.
- All backups are a "full" backup. No incrementals, no differentials.
- Someone takes the backup tape offsite each night and does not bring back each tape until another one has gone offsite. As we mentioned earlier, the absolute best thing

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to do here is to get a third party like VaultCentral (www.vaultcentral.com.au) to take your tapes ofsite and store them securely in their secure vault.

- At the end of each month, try to use the lowest-numbered tape.
- Test the end-of-month tape by restoring some files and mailboxes.
- The end-of-month tape goes off-site permanently. You'll cycle through 12 tapes per year.

Why do we have to take tapes out of circulation?

We take tapes offsite permanently for several reasons. First, reliability. The more times you use a tape, the less likely you are to get a perfect backup. It gets stretched, it gets magnetized. Just think about that cassette tape you used to love but can't listen to anymore because of the popping and hissing.

Second, the cost is low. You're only swapping out 12 tapes per year. If your office is flooded, and you need to rebuild the server, \$200 worth of tapes will seem very cheap.

Third, the monthly tapes are a nice legal and accounting "snapshot" of your business.

We have prepared a sample page of instructions for your designated staff member to follow, available in both Word and PDF format. If you'd like a free copy, let us know via the Contact Us page on our website (www.netcare.net.au).

3. Do regular test restores

At the beginning of each month, it is good practice to take your last backup tape and restore a few files to a temporary directory (you can delete them later). This keeps you familiar with the restore procedure and far more importantly, it verifies that you have a working backup.

4. Label your backup tapes

When you take a tape off-site, it should be labeled with basic information you will need to use it in case of an emergency. This includes domain name, backup password, and the software used for the backup.

We have prepared a template to be used with Avery labels, number 5160, available in both Word and PDF format. If you'd like a free copy, let us know via the Contact Us page on our website (www.netcare.net.au).

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Final Note

I hope you realize by now that the backup process is critical for your business, especially if you're the Owner, Director, or Financial Controller. Whilst putting the procedure in place to do backups may appear a lot of effort, once it's in, it's easy to perform and monitor. And it's certainly worth the peace of mind – even if you never have a disaster!

Finally, if you live in Sydney, Australia, I'd like to make you a special offer...

Too many times, we've come across new clients who have been horrified to find that their backups aren't working.

Or that they're not backing up the data they thought they were.

Or they haven't been doing consistent backups and they're worried about what might happen.

Or they're backing up some data regularly to CDs and they're in a false state of security, because they're backing up far less data than what they actually need to be backing up.

Or they've never checked their backup tapes can be read by doing a test restore.

Or they're not backing up at all!!!

We want to make sure YOU don't find out the hard way that you've got any of these problems in your business too!

That's why we'll arrange for one of IT Specialists to visit your site within 48 hours of taking your phone call and we'll undertake the 7 Step Data Security Check for you – at no cost. All you have to do is call us NOW on this number:

1300-00-77-36

I also want to be very clear that there are no expectations on our part for you to do or buy anything when you take us up on our offer.

However, I cannot extend this offer forever because time and staff limitations simply won't allow it. In order to secure your 7 Step Data Security Check, you MUST respond to this letter by 31st March 2008. If you don't, I'll be forced to withdraw this offer and make it available to someone else.

Regards



Darryl McAllister
Managing Director

P.S. We're proud of the lengths we go to to keep our clients happy – here's what some of them have to say about us...

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Fast Support and “Owning” the Problem

“What we like most about the NetCare team is that they always answer the phone promptly and immediately deal with the issue. We are on the **NETCARE PLATINUM** plan and every time we require attention the matter is 100% resolved regardless of the effort required. There is also no attempt to blame a problem on the hardware brand, the software supplier, or the ISP – once an issue is raised with NetCare they ‘own’ it till it’s solved”.

Stephen Holt, Managing Director, All Stake Supply

Friendly and Responsive

“The decision to outsource something as important as IT is never easy. What swung it for NetCare was their track record of friendliness and responsiveness over a number of years. Their experience means we have a rock-solid, stable system in place – and that’s absolutely essential to us as every single architect in our team is completely dependent upon their PC and the network”.

Bruce Robins, Senior Architect, D+R Architects

Impressively Fast with Peace of Mind

“We had a problem today with the loss of the connection between our two sites. I was impressed with how quickly the NetCare team was able to diagnose the issue and then attend the site with a replacement router. Its great to have the peace of mind that when I cannot solve a problem, I have NetCare there to assist”.

Ben Davis, IT Manager, Quality Ingredients

New Server Installed with No Hitches and No Over-sell

“The new server installation was quick with no hitches. One day the old server was there, the next day we were all working off the new one. What’s more there was no over-sell – the consultant discussed our requirements and then presented a proposal that exactly met those requirements without trying to include extra products or services”.

Alan Perret, GTK Rehab

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Outstanding knowledge and friendly staff

“Our previous support company wasn't giving us the support we needed, so we switched to NetCare and we haven't been disappointed.

Every problem we've had has been sorted out quickly and efficiently. NetCare have always shown their professionalism and we have consistently found them to be reliable, responsive, friendly, and willing to go above and beyond the call of duty.”

Victor Jeries, Brendma Pty Limited

A Technology Company that Speaks Plain-English

“We have found the NetCare support team to be first class. They offer prompt professional service with a great friendly attitude, nothing is too much trouble. Even we non-technical types can understand their instructions. We have only the highest praise for them and would recommend their services without hesitation.”

Stacie O'Brien, Admin & Operations Manager, Go Vita Distributors

Initiative and knowledge saves the day

“The people working at NetCare have done a tremendous job today in getting us back up and running. They used their initiative and knowledge and were not only able to fix a critical computer in our manufacturing facility that had broke down but also provide a backup computer from an old tower we had in the office. A job well done at such short notice.”

Maurice Coco, Finance Manager, N&F Arcuili Pty Limited

IT services that scale

“We have found that as our business has grown, the services provided by NetCare have been able to scale up with us. I have access to technical expertise that has traditionally been too expensive for a small business to obtain, and the NetCare personnel are more like staff in the way they have come to understand our business.”

Dean Bassett, Branch Manager, Destiny Financial Solutions