

TECH-TALK!

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HOW MUCH IS YOUR DATA WORTH?

Of the many articles appearing in this column, this author has only marginally dealt with the output of your efforts; your data, the information that is routinely created & accumulated from day to day operations. Much of it is transitional or temporary in nature while some of it is really important to your business and ongoing operations. This coupled with the awareness of the integrity of ongoing operations, leads to the core of this issue's article.

Some wise person once said, " don't be concerned if your computer is going to (completely) crash, it's just a matter of when it will happen". That being said, the chances of have anything from a minor computer crash (where you loose the information that you are currently working on) to a major crash where you can not re-boot your system or you have lost everything on the hard drive is a reality which most of us would rather not consider. But the reality of this scenario is closer to possibility than not. This then prompts us to consider two factors; **how do we save our important data (backup) and how often do we do it (frequency)?**

Let us first consider the how question. There are numerous devices and processes available to everyone for saving data that is important to us or to our business. These devices can be divided into two major categories; ongoing and long term.

Ongoing backup of data is often the function of some software programs such as word processing programs. In this regard, the software can be set to save your work at a preset amount of time (in minutes) either set by the program default or reset by you. (Check your word processing program to see if this is the case with your software). This usually takes the form of creating a temporary file that can be restored as long as the computer is not turned off or it has not totally crashed. A more realistic approach in word processing or any other software used to create and house data is to develop a working file for this information. This should be done prior to starting your work and the information should be save back to that file on a regular timely basis. (During the course of writing this article, the author will back up its contents most likely six or more times). The rule of thumb here is to save the data as often as you feel it would be very time consuming to recreate it from scratch. Soooooo, if it is a complex idea, ideas in a related sequence or a series of numerical data entries (such as that of a quote) then you might want to back it up as each item has been developed.

The next question that comes to mind is where should this file be stored? If you created the file on your hard drive, is that were you want to leave it? Should your computer crash or not be accessible then how would you get this information? The solution to this problem leads us from ongoing to long term storage.

Long term storage has many faces. The choice of the "medium" is dependant on the nature of the data; somewhat of a "catch-22" situation. The two most significant factors are size of the data file and how often it will be accessed. If files are relatively small and frequently used they can be stored on a 3" floppy disk. Since these are usually removed from the computer after use, their integrity for use with another computer having the same software is limitless. If on the other hand, if the file is larger than the limited capacity of a 3" floppy disk, different alternatives have to be considered.

Other alternatives (in increasing storage capacity options) are: Zip Drives (internal & external), CD ROM-Write & Rewrite Drives (internal & external CD Burners), DVD Write & Rewrite Drives (internal & external DVD Burners), additional Hard Drives (internal & external), Tape Backup Devices (internal & external), Web Site Storage facilities often referred to as "Remote Location" storage and finally multiple off site storage facilities often referred to as "Co-Location" facilities.

Each of the above alternative choices depends on data file size, frequency of use and security considerations for your data. These alternative on the later part of the list become viable for total backup of your entire hard drive(s) data depending again of the amount of data to be stored. When talking about total backup of data it is often suggested that the backup data be stored at an alternative location, that is, not where the computer is located. Then, in the case of a physical disaster where the computer is destroyed (hurricane, lightening, fire, electrical, etc.) the data is secure and can be utilized on another computer. Total backup can be manual or automatic depending on how you choose to get the job done. Many storage software programs provide multiple avenues to accomplish this task.

The trick in making decisions about saving and storing data is to determine the degree of priority for the data, because not all data is equal in value. This is generally referred to as "Data Storage Management" and while this term is traditionally associated with huge amounts of data it is very much applicable to everyone, regardless of the amount of data to be saved. The bottom line here is to have a plan, a plan for the temporary storage & permanent storage of important data. Only you can make the determination of what is important data in your specific situation and for your working needs.

Key to this entire discussion is pre-planning. Plan ahead and avoid the panic after the disaster has befallen you. Take the time now, while everything is working to decide what data you need to save, how you will save it and equally important, how often to save it. Someone else has offered the advice that "it is certainly easier to prepare for disaster than to have to cope with it after the fact".

There is no one solution and certainly no one solution for everyone. Each situation is different and requires a different plan to solve the problem, but at the very least, have a plan and follow it. No one device will solve all the problems either; usually a combination of the above listed options would seem to work best.

Keep thinking about how you choose to save important data and how often you do it. Continued attention to it will undoubtedly save you lots of problems down the road as you consider, "How Much Is Your Data Worth?"

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