

Importance of Backups

Are you prepared for the worst? Just imagine if you suddenly lost your entire database of clients, your entire "My Documents" folder, all of the e-mail that you have ever sent or received, all of your QuickBooks® or Quicken® data, or even all of the "favorites" that you have accumulated in your web browser. Most people are aware of the potential for such a tragedy, but too few actually heed the warnings by making regular back-ups of their important data.

I recently received a call from a client for whom disaster had struck. Without warning, their hard drive crashed. They had a backup plan. They had a ZIP drive, the backup software was set to backup the data to the ZIP drive every night. Once a month they were running a separate backup of the important data. Only one problem. At some point their previous technician had changed from an old tape drive to the ZIP drive. After installing the ZIP he found that the existing backup software wouldn't recognize the ZIP drive. So, he went and fiddled and twiddled and adjusted all the appropriate registry entries etc, until it did finally recognize the ZIP drive. He then set the backup software not to display any notifications, only record a log. Well a little time goes by and the software in the machine needs to be updated. The updates are installed by the software company and now, unbeknownst to the client, the backup software doesn't recognize the ZIP drive anymore (remember no notifications only log files). They keep changing cartridges and performing monthly backups.

Then one day nothing. Dead drive. They call me to come have a look. I say upgrade the old machine and then install the backup. Well when it's time to install the backup it turns out they did not have any of the data backed up for the last 5 months and the business came to a screeching halt. We tried to have a recovery company do their thing but at over \$3000 to attempt to restore the data on the crashed drive (a service not covered under any warranty) and very little hope that any data was still there... well, OUCH!

This real world scenario occurs everyday - but it rarely happens to the same person twice. Believe me, they now back up their data to his Zip® drive religiously and check to make sure it is valid - wouldn't you? Shouldn't you?

There are basically two approaches to backing up your data. The first, safest, and most common is the full-system back-up. This method copies all of the directories and files on your hard drive. Unfortunately, with most back-up systems, this process can take several hours and may require a number of cartridges (or whatever type of media your particular back-up system uses).

The second method is only backing up your irreplaceable data. The benefit here is that your back-up time is significantly shorter and less storage is required since you are not backing up the entire drive. This method is not appropriate for everyone since it can be difficult to locate and identify all of the critical data on your hard drive. Once this has been accomplished though, the back-up set is saved so that the process does not have to be repeated each time you perform a back-up.

In either case, if your hard drive crashes, it is likely that you will still find it necessary to reinstall your operating system (OS) and most of your software from their original installation disks. Looking on the bright side, this gives you a brand new installation of your OS and software, which often renews some lost performance. You would then proceed to restore your data from your back-up and move merrily along your way. Gosh, that almost sounded easy. Do not be fooled - the restoration can be a long, tedious process; however, it is well worth it considering where you would be without any back-up at all.

Backing up your data is so important. Of course, there are many variables to consider, including what type of back-up system to use (hardware and software), which back-up method to use, how to identify critical/irreplaceable data, how often to perform a back-up and confirm regularly that the backup is indeed running correctly. The main purpose of this article, however, was simply to impress upon you the importance of backing up your data - regardless of how you do it. It is one of those things where we often have the mentality of "It'll never happen to me!" Well, it happens everyday. If it happens to you, will you be prepared?

