



Back up now or be sorry later

Data is a vital business asset, but also a fragile one. For instance, a hard drive crash, a virus or a natural disaster could instantly result in the loss of all your customer lists and financial records.

Unfortunately, most businesses don't talk about making a backup copy of their business data until after such a disaster strikes. By then, it's often too late.

You can easily create a backup file so you can restore critical business information on your computers, but it requires planning and consistent effort. Here's what you need to do.

Decide what to save

The first step involves deciding what data you need to protect. You probably do not need to back up any of your word processing, spreadsheet or other types of programs. Programs can be re-installed from their original disks. Even in a major disaster, it should be relatively easy to obtain replacement disks.

What you need to be concerned with is anything your business creates. This would include:

- Databases, including customer contact data and ordering records, as well as inventory information
- Financial software data files, including spreadsheets
- Documents, including important correspondence, memos, work products and anything related to your business plan
- E-mail, especially messages that contain critical data like customer queries and contact information
- Web site files, unless your site is hosted by a third party elsewhere
- Any other data that would create a significant hardship if it were lost

You may also want to save system configuration files and other settings files, such as your Internet bookmarks, but these are not as important as the other files.

Before going any further, make sure you have a list of folders that contain files you need to back up.

Using backup software

Now that you know what you need to save, you need to start making regular backups. While you can make backups by manually copying your important files, if you have a lot of files or folders, that process is very labor intensive.

It is better to use backup software. One choice is the backup package that came with your operating system. Both Windows XP and Windows Small Business Server 2003 include tools for backing up. The backup tool that ships with Microsoft Windows XP Professional is already installed. (If you use Windows XP Home Edition, you will need to install it from the installation CD.)

To set up Windows Backup, click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, point to **Accessories**, point to **System Tools**, then click **Backup**. Click **Next** to acknowledge the opening screen, then select **Backup Files and Settings** and click **Next**.

Windows Backup will now ask you which files you want it to save for you. You probably do not want to select **All information on this computer** as that will make copies of everything, including all of your program files. If you have installed a lot of software, you will end up with a huge backup file that is too large to save.

If everyone keeps all of their important files in their own My Documents folder, you can select **Everyone's documents and settings**. Otherwise, you should select **Let me choose what to backup** and select every folder you identified as important. When you are done, click **Next**.

Windows Small Business Server 2003 also comes with a Backup Configuration Wizard that allows you to specify the folders you would like to copy, whether the backup should be saved to a hard drive or a tape drive and how frequently the backups should be performed. You can also use the tool to launch a backup manually.

Understand your storage options

The backup tools will create one file that contains all of your important documents, but you need to tell it where to save the file. By default, it will want to save that file to a floppy disk, but if you have a lot of information, you may need dozens or even hundreds of disks.

Another option is to save the backup somewhere on your network or onto a second hard drive in your computer. Just click **Browse** and select the location where you want to save the file. Give the file a descriptive name and click **Next**.

While this type of backup will give you some protection if a hard drive fails or if a virus strikes, in the event of a fire or natural disaster, you are likely to lose the entire computer — and therefore all of your data. For that reason, you should

regularly copy your backup file onto a CD, DVD or external drive that you can store in a protected location far away from your place of business.

You will find the backup file in the folder you specified in Windows Backup. If the file is less than 640 megabytes, you can use a CD burner to save that file onto a standard CD-ROM. If it is larger, you will need to use DVDs. Make sure your burner is capable of writing to recordable DVDs.

You can also use reusable media, such as flash drives and external hard drives. Check the size of your backup file to determine how much storage space you will need.

More backup advice

Here are some additional recommendations to follow when performing backups:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Don't forget that your data is only as secure as your last backup. If your hard drive crashes and you have not backed up data in a month, you have just lost a month's worth of work. That is why it is so important to back up your data on a regular basis. You will probably want to back up the files to your hard drive or network server every night. The backup tools enable you to select backup frequency and times.
- **Off-site storage.** While it's a good idea to back up data onto your network or a tape every night, you also need to set a schedule for saving your files on a CD, DVD or removable storage device that you can transport off-site. To determine how often you need to make those backups, simply ask yourself, how much data can your business afford to lose?
- **Practise restoring your data.** It's best if you never need to use your backups, but it is nice to know that restoring your data requires barely more effort than it took to back it up. If you're using Windows Small Business Server 2003, there are procedures for restoring everything from entire servers to single files. Windows Backup also enables you to restore your files using the backup file. You should test your backup procedure before you need to use it, however. Use a computer that's not connected to your network and that has only the operating system installed. If you test the backups on your existing network, there's a chance you could accidentally overwrite new files with old data or miss identifying potential problems.

Backups are great insurance against disaster and system failure, but this insurance policy is good only if you take the time to regularly back up your system.

Quick Tips

Making regular backup files of any important data you have is always a good idea. One way to back up e-mail messages in Outlook is to use the AutoArchive feature. Archiving means moving messages to an archive folder at regularly scheduled intervals.

For more advanced assistance, call PC Pal today on 01603 766716

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