

The Little Old Lady From Pasadena

By Richard Dolewski

On my return trip from the First Annual COMMON conference in Anaheim, I was seated on my flight home beside a charming grandmother. She was a petit independent elderly woman with lots of grit. When she formally introduced herself and mentioned that she lived in Pasadena, California, I could not help but to start singing the Beach Boys' tune: "It's The Little Old Lady from Pasadena." Thankfully for everyone on board the flight, the tune was rehearsed in mind versus being sung out loud by yours truly. (No emergency evacuation was required.) Casual conversations eventually turned to: "What do you do son, for a living?" I replied that I am a Business Continuity professional and I help ensure that organizations recover their IT infrastructure in a disaster. I figured that was where the conversation would stop. But this sparked a level of interest with her, starting with how do I help a company recover in a disaster? Well as you can imagine I rubbed my hands together and started talking about my favorite topic: Backups.

After a good 30 minutes of conversation she simply shocked me when she started telling me about her own backup strategy for her desktop at home. I marveled at the level of detail and technical knowledge she displayed. She used several software solutions and used 2 external hard drives, just to be safe. Her entire point was that if she would ever lose the information on her PC she would be as good as dead and she sure planned to outlive her PC. The home computer had her grandchildren photos, her music collection (containing Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and various big band artists), her life diary, recipes, and her online bridge club. She used her PC for most everything as she was unable to drive much at her age. She laughed and said "My driving... now that's a disaster!"

Importance of Having Backups

So I ask every one of you: How does your laptop or home computer backup strategy stack up against this little old lady from Pasadena? I have been preaching for years about backup policies for protecting your corporate data but what about your own laptop or personal data? Data is an asset of your corporation, and I am sure your family feels the same about your family data.

Today, most of us rely heavily on computers to help accomplish daily tasks: email, word processing, presentations, work related documents, as these common tools are used to aid us in our daily business lives. Our systems are susceptible to a multitude of dangers ranging from hardware or software failure to theft of a laptop. While computers enable us all to be efficient in our work, we would be totally useless without our laptop or home desktop. Don't wait for disaster to strike. Review your own backups NOW. Make sure that best practices are being followed at home.




There are many options to fit your time, budget, and technical experience. Here are a few things of which to be aware: backups can be made to CDs and DVDs. This is especially effective on a computer for file level backups. Many laptops and desktops come with a built-in CD burner. Blank discs can be purchased almost anywhere these days. Know the difference between CD-R (data can't be overwritten) vs. CD-RW (reusable). Consider the use of external drives. Buy a name brand. External hard drives, Zip drives, or other USB enabled external drives now have the capacity to even store file and complete system backups. Disk has become cheap, and these external hard drives can store as much as an internal hard drive on your PC. Buy external drives with as much space



as you can afford. Online backup providers offer storage and restoration from the system level to the file level via high speed Internet. Online application service providers have significantly improved their offerings to include encryption, and effective software client agents.

Regardless of how you backup your data, the backups are useless unless the restoration process has been tested. A sufficient backup model includes being able to restore the files, applications, and complete systems. This ability should be tested periodically to make sure that the backup media has not become corrupt and the chosen methodology is properly saving the data.

Not backing up computer files is an invitation for disaster. Whether a corrupted file, a nasty virus, lighting (I have had this misfortune), or human error occurs, most of us will experience loss of some or all of our PC data eventually. Don't wait until you have something to regret.

As our flight came to an end our conversation was becoming scarce, when the little old lady said, "I always backup my computer—after all I would be crazy not to. Obviously everyone in your computer field must backup theirs as well..." I just smiled and started singing the song again in my own mind... "It's the little old lady from Pasadena... Go granny, go granny, go granny, go!" 

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