

Desktop Guerrillas

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FLIRTING WITH DISASTER

Can your business recover from a fire at your office? Or even a power outage while you are in the middle of writing a report? We'll show you how.

A disaster recovery plan (sometimes called a "business continuity plan") is something every organization should have. It outlines the processes for minimizing the effect of a disruption in your business infrastructure. It could be fire, flood, or a server failure. Planning for events like these can be an expensive and lengthy process—sometimes representing up to 25% of an organization's technology budget. But when you consider that even minor disruptions have put many a company out of business, implementing a disaster recovery plan is a necessary step.

Here are some simple ideas you can use to help protect yourself from common computing disasters.

BACK UP AND STORE OFF-SITE

It's been estimated that over 4 million computers a year have been victims of some sort of data loss. Your critical documents, books, or contacts can be gone in the blink of an eye. It's actually quite likely that this will happen to your business (if it hasn't already), but few of us take the threat of data loss seriously. Some popular, manageable options include the following.

- **Back up to CD or tape:** A program like Genie Backup Pro (\$69) will make fast work of most backups.
- **Back up to external hard drive:** Maxtor makes an external hard drive with a single button. Press it, and your data will be immediately backed up for safe keeping. It's portable, so you can take it off-site.
- **Online backup services:** For as little as \$15 a month, your critical files can be encrypted and whisked away to a secure location on the other side of the Internet. This is a great option if you are worried about environmental disasters or don't want to hassle with moving backup media off-site.

KEEP AN ALTERNATIVE EMAIL ADDRESS READY

We've all been there at one time or another: waiting desperately for an email, hitting "refresh" furiously, receiving nothing. We may even blame the sender, having him or her resend over and over. Unfortunately, there's quite a bit that can go wrong in the delivery of an email message. Outages can sometimes extend into days. That's why it's a good idea to have a backup mail account in case your primary fails.

Get a free account on Yahoo, Hotmail, or any mail service of your choice. If you're having problems with email, have your business contacts send to this new alternate email address.

BUY A UPS

No, we're not talking about the shipping company. A UPS is a device that provides battery backup in case of power failure. It typically provides about 10 minutes of battery time; not enough to finish that report, but certainly enough to save your documents and shut down. That's also long enough to bridge the frequent power outages in some areas, which tend to last on the order of minutes, not hours.

ENABLE AUTOSAVE

One minute you're typing a report, and the next minute you're staring at a cryptic message about Word unexpectedly quitting. In an instant you've lost the past 4 hours of work.

We've all been there, but there's a way to minimize the loss of a crashed application. Look for the "autosave" feature and activate it. This will save a copy of your file at the interval you specify (if you don't work with large files, set it for as low as every minute) so that if the program crashes or power fails, you'll have a recent copy of your work.

HAVE A BACKUP INTERNET CONNECTION

Having your Internet connection fail can be very disruptive, yet it is a common occurrence. Have a computer ready with a modem and a dialup account so that at least one system can access the Internet. Your office may even be in range of a public wireless access point. Also check with your broadband provider—you may be entitled to free dialup. For instance, SBC provides its DSL customers with dialup service to access the Internet during failures, or when on the road.

KEEP ALL YOUR SOFTWARE IN ONE PLACE

Make a habit of keeping all your installation media and manuals in one location. This will make your life much easier if you need to quickly reload the operating system and applications on a computer.

SAVE YOUR OLD COMPUTER AS A STANDBY

Large enterprises will have entire off-site locations on the ready so that in case of fire or some other disaster, they can keep processing. Here's a low-cost version: treat yourself to a new computer, and keep the old computer, including all the applications you need to run your business, tucked away at home. That and a recent backup may be all you need to stay running if something were to happen to your office.

Hopefully these are helpful tips to follow, but keep in mind that they do not represent a comprehensive plan. Have an expert implement, document, and test a solution that will keep your company running strong in any situation.

Desktop Guerrillas is an IT consulting firm serving small businesses in the Fairfield County area. We can help you develop a plan to make sure your company is protected against both big and small catastrophes.