

Start Page: Prepare your firm for a disaster before one strikes

Kim Brand June 19, 2013



START PAGE

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As the deadly spring storms in Moore, Okla., on consecutive weekends have shown, lightning may indeed strike twice in the same place. If this is the type of unlikely event you thought was too rare to plan for – my advice is to start planning now!

You don't need to be a technology expert to understand disaster planning. In fact, it may be an advantage not to be. What most of our customers want is continuity and productivity. Preparing to continue operations in the face of disaster can be as simple as simulating small disasters and observing the reaction of your organization. You may be surprised how fragile your organization is.

As I have described before, most law firms are ill-prepared for an interruption in their Internet service. The impact can be diminished by setting up a hotspot on your mobile phone. Outsourcing your email to a cloud service provider is another defensive strategy. Here, bigger is better. The considerable investments made in “disaster avoidance” by providers that have the resources to deploy multiple data centers are clearly superior to those affordable by the typical law firm.

Backups – local and offsite – are fundamental . . . but not enough. Don't be confused by the difference between “backup” and disaster recovery. Convenient, secure and inexpensive options for protecting your data in the cloud have never been greater. But if your PC fails, *access* to the information you've so carefully backed up may be lost together with your software, settings, activation codes and personal configuration details. We have visited with many clients that “thought” they had cloud backups but couldn't recall the name of the provider, their login credentials or what was backed up. They were shocked that the vendor was difficult to reach or generally unhelpful when they did. What do you expect for \$5 a month?

I recommend that in addition to data backup you consider system imaging, too. This is a method for protecting what I call the rest of the “Value Stack” of your information technology assets.

Full system-imaging programs that “mirror” PC hard drives on inexpensive/portable USB hard drives cost less than \$100. They can be used to replicate a PC in about two hours. The alternative: re-installing, configuring and licensing all the software on a PC can take a day or more.

Take the time to simulate and prepare for disaster today.

Survey the equipment you use: Identify each device that connects to your network. Document who put it there, when it was purchased, what it does and who you call to fix it.

Survey the services you use: Audit your bills. Who do you pay? What is their support commitment? How do you reach them during/after business hours? What are the subscription details?

Survey the software you use: Where/how did you buy it? Where are the license/activation keys? What is the vendor’s support commitment?

Pull the plug!

Seriously, pick a time and run a disaster drill! What is your plan of action? Does a dead server, PC, Internet connection or network switch create mayhem? Does life end if you can’t get email for a few minutes (or few days)? You can effectively simulate any of these disasters by “pulling” the network connection from any device.

Every firm should have one or two trained staff who can take charge during a disaster. They should have a list of contact information, including phone numbers and personal email addresses, for every employee. Vendor and service provider contact information should be documented. Today, it is easy to store this information, preferably encrypted and/or password protected, in a spreadsheet kept online or on a mobile device. It’s also handy to print it out and keep at home. Remember: You may not have access to your office network so keeping it on a PC or server is not a good idea!

The attitude you should have regarding equipment or service failures is not “if” but “when” it will happen. The only thing you can control is “what” you will do about it. The time to prepare for a storm is while the sun is shining. •

The Value Stack – remember to protect all of it!

- **Hardware:** vendor, warranty/ replacement details
 - **Operating system:** licenses, activation codes, etc.
 - **Configuration:** users, groups and permissions
 - **Application software:** licenses and updates
 - **Data**
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