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Technology > Losing It

Take the necessary precautions and back up your data—you'll save yourself a lot of trouble should things go wrong.

words by > Lee Gimpel



A few years ago, my computer crashed. Few things in life are as frustrating as this major inconvenience. Yes, I had many files backed up. Of course, if I'd known the hard drive was going to die in the next day or two, I'd have been religious in my backups, but that's the thing about such calamities—they're unexpected.

If losing my own computer can be such a pain, obviously that pain is magnified as businesses increase in size. And it's not just frustration; in the information age, data makes or breaks a company. Indeed, technology consulting firm Gartner Inc. found that of those small and midsize businesses that have a major data failure longer than a day, half will go out of business.

So, it's a good idea to plan ahead—fight fire with fire, as it were. While a dependence on data is the issue, there has never been a better time to use technology to save it.

An external hard drive such as Seagate's 300 GB pushbutton model is a first layer for data backup (expect to pay \$150 to \$250 for a personal device). Look for one with a speedy FireWire connection and expect to pay more for an iPod that, aside from music, can also store important files. These will save your computer if it crashes, but if the office experiences a fire or flood, they won't be much help.

"Remote data backup is a more secure option," says Chaz Popovich, vice president of IT consulting firm OSI Technologies. After all, even if you have backup tapes secured in a fireproof safe, a disaster in the area means it might take days or weeks before you can access them. There are plenty of remote backup options on the market. On the basic end, check out mozy.com, which offers 2 GB of storage for free or 30 GB for \$4.95 per month. Pricier options will run \$10 to \$20 per month for about 5 GB but often include phone support. If you require more storage, check out industrial-size solutions from providers such as Iron Mountain.

Remember that you can scan in important paper documents—think insurance policies or lease agreements—and back those up too just in case you can't get to the filing cabinet where you stored them.

Contingency Planning and Disaster Recovery: A Small Business Guide (Wiley) offers practical advice from two authors with disaster experience. Donna R. Childs is a former Swiss Reinsurance Company executive who worked in lower Manhattan on September 11, and Stefan Dietrich is an IT professional who contributed to Deutsche Bank's disaster-recovery operations following the 1993 Bishopsgate bombing in London. ✈