



Experts: Disaster Data Recovery Should Be HR's Concern

By Greg Wright

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A company's IT department should not be the only department charged with backing up important computer data in case a fire, flood or other disaster strikes, legal and database experts say.

Experts say human resource professionals should make sure that their companies have a disaster recovery plan in place. Yet, at least one study reveals, many do not.

It's important because HR can be responsible for storing data on computers that are crucial to a company's survival and profitability, experts say. And some of this information helps companies avoid expensive legal headaches.

This data includes employees' health information, noncompetition agreements from former employees, health and safety documentation, and pension records that can date back decades, said **I. Jeffrey Pheterson**, a lawyer at the Ward Damon law firm in West Palm Beach, Fla.

"You want to make sure you are keeping those documents in a secure location," said **Pheterson**, who is an expert in labor and employment law.

Institute Plans

More business information, including e-mails and legal documents, is being stored online. However, officials at IT companies are still surprised that many companies have no data backup plan or rely on inadequate and outdated ways to store digitalized copies of crucial company documents.

Only 47 percent of 1,700 small and medium-sized U.S. businesses had a data recovery plan in place in case trouble strikes, according to a 2009 survey from [Symantec](#), a leading storage and data protection software company. And only about one out of five of these companies backed up data on a daily basis. What's more, the average small or medium-sized business backed up only 60 percent of its data at that time, according to the survey.

Yet, the threat of data disruption is very real, the Symantec survey stated. The typical small or medium-sized business experienced three outages in 2008 attributable to viruses, hacker attacks, power outages and natural disasters such as hurricanes.

“Small companies are the most vulnerable—they are putting all their faith in local tech [staff] that may be qualified or not qualified,” said Chuck Hoover, a vice president at ECO Data Recovery, a Palm Spring Gardens, Fla., business that helps companies recover lost data from desktop computers, laptops, notebooks and server hard drives.

However, advancements in disaster data backup technology, including “cloud computing,” faster Internet speed and cheaper storage systems, are making it easier for companies and their human resource departments to get back up and running after an emergency occurs.

Cloud computing allows companies to back up data in secure locations that could be hundreds of miles away from their main office. It allows them to access this data via the Internet if a mishap prevents employees from working out of the main office, Hoover said.

When Disaster Strikes

Disasters that threaten computer data come in many forms.

Companies and their HR departments might think that they are immune from a data disaster if they do not live in areas prone to hurricanes or earthquakes that can destroy their offices or make it impossible for employees to work on-site.

But disasters can come in the form of disgruntled employees, said Felipe Portocarrero, director of operations at VOLO LLC in Ormond Beach, Fla. One service VOLO provides is helping companies restore communications after such a disaster.

Portocarrero remembers one architectural company that fired an employee who returned after hours and sought revenge on the company by attacking its computer system.

“They didn’t change [the] locks ... and she came back the night she got fired and erased 20 years of architectural documents—everything this company had ever had stored, the whole life blood of the business,” Portocarrero said.

This is one of the many reasons why off-site storage of company data is crucial, experts agree.

Many companies that back up data do it poorly, Portocarrero said. For instance, some companies back up computer data on outdated tapes that are kept in the office or in nearby bank vaults, he said.

However, officials of these companies might not realize that there might not be machines available to read data stored on these tapes, which look like old-fashioned movie reels. And it is unwise to keep backed-up data on tapes or hard drives in a company’s main office because these

systems will be unavailable if a hurricane or power outage makes it impossible for employees to get to the site.

Legal and IT experts urge companies and their HR departments to use new services to have data backed up automatically on computers in remote locations built to withstand disasters.

Akken, a software company in Nashua, N.H., that offers automation services to staffing and recruiting companies, is one of several companies that offer clients such a solution, CEO Giridhar Akkineni says.

Akken can back up a company's data at their recovery center and, if disaster strikes, company staff can access business information and get a company running again by accessing company files through the Internet no matter where they are located.

The chief drawback to backing up data off-site is that it can cost thousands of dollars for equipment or monthly service to set up a fail-safe system or contract out the service, especially for small companies, experts say.

However, companies should still have a workable disaster data recovery plan, and all departments—including human resources—should urge companies to create them.

“There is no official requirement or mandate to have a certain level of technology. But there are best practices employees should use,” **Pheterson** said.

“It makes much sense to have off-site storage for your data.”

Greg Wright is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance writer who has covered Congress, consumer electronics and international trade for major news organizations, including Gannett News Service/USA Today, Dow Jones and Knight-Ridder Financial News. He can be reached at gregoryleonwright@msn.com.

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