Five backup mistakes you might be making

By Anthea Nadin

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High availability does not a business strategy make. The continued survival of a business is not just about protecting against downtime, but ensuring data redundancy should disaster strike. And yet, despite how fundamentally important maintaining and protecting data is, businesses continue to make these five common mistakes.

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Not backing up often enough

I'm often asked about the frequency at which a business should be backing data up. Unfortunately, there is no one backup interval to fit all. It all depends on the type of data – how often it's manipulated or altered. Important spreadsheets, for example, can have hundreds of small iterations made in a single day. It may be ideal to implement an application that makes a backup every 15 minutes, but again, it would depend on the circumstances. At a minimum on workloads that change daily, you should be backing up your data daily.

Lacklustre business continuity planning

Best practices necessitate that businesses establish recovery time objectives – a targeted duration of time and an acceptable level of integrity within which data must be restored. That's where business can fall short, even if they're performing regular backups.

Businesses fail to conduct the appropriate impact analysis before establishing backup and recovery initiatives, with little idea of what is required to maintain continuity following a disaster. It's vital that you clearly communicate recovery time objectives to IT, and be sure to entail exactly what amount of data you can afford to lose and what needs to be kept.

Not following the 3-2-1 rule

The '3-2-1' rule is simple but incredibly effective. The idea is that you need a minimum of three copies of any data you deem pivotal to business continuity, split across at least two different types of media, with a third kept off-site. That not only protects you against data corruption but a multitude of disaster scenarios – crime, a fire, a virus on the local network, or anything else that might affect the workplace.

Ineffective management and monitoring of backups

I've heard a number of data recovery horror stories, and the most frustrating fact is that many of them could have been avoided. Too often, data backups are made at a prescribed frequency and the business continues on its merry way, only to discover a backup is corrupt following a disaster. A backup is only as good as the last recoverable point. Backup data integrity needs to be monitored, and there are a number of tools that can do just that.

Setting up proactive systems that monitor, alert and even notify the appropriate staff when there is a problem, would go a long way to securing data. Once implemented, a correctly configured dashboard can give a business a view of hardware and software, as well as the state of backups. The most effective tools will notify a business as far in advance as possible, so that they have the best possible opportunity to make informed decisions and take corrective measures.

Rejecting expertise

Businesses should not dismiss the importance of working with the right technology partners. All businesses should be empowered and have access to their systems and data. But the complex nature of data recovery, as well as the dedicated resources required for effective data redundancy, makes it critical to work with partners that have the appropriate experience and certified specialisations.

By choosing a suitable partner, businesses ensure that the dedicated skills to troubleshoot, implement or even manage backups is always on hand. Crucially, without time to dedicate to ensure backup security and integrity, there's always room for something to go wrong. But even then, it's still important for businesses to bear all of the considerations above in mind. It only takes a single poor decision to spiral wildly out of control.

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