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Do you have an IT Disaster Recovery Plan on your yacht? YachtBackup – a brand new, revolutionary data backup service for yachts

This month, we're going to look at a new product on the market from YachtBackup. It's a fantastic product, very simple and effective, and we have been busily installing it over the last month.

These days, most of us use our computer on a regular basis. However, imagine going to your computer one morning, only to discover it has stopped working, and nothing you do seems to get it working again. Perhaps it has even been stolen, damaged by fire or water, or something inside has simply given up the ghost...

Next, think of the headache you face when you realize that all the files which you kept on your computer have gone. Yes, *really* gone. All your financial data, emails, contacts, historical documents, photos, drawings - everything, gone. How disastrous is that? At E3 we are so dependent on technology and electronic storage of all our data, that we would be well and truly out of business if that occurred...

You probably think that problems like that don't happen very often. Well, I'm afraid to say that they do. At E3, we should know, as we deal with them on an all too frequent basis. We recently carried out an interesting exercise, where we looked at all of the emergency jobs we had been asked to do where data loss had been an issue. Between us, we couldn't remember a single case of a failed hard drive, where there had been an adequate backup plan in place. Twice in the past year, we have had to fly a technician overseas to do a server rebuild. Just this week we were asked to have a new computer configured and ready for a boat arriving from the Caribbean.

On three occasions, we have been obliged to send severely damaged hard drives to the only company capable of recovering this type of data, which happens to be the one which recovered hard drives from the Space Shuttle Colombia. And those boats paid NASA prices too, because the data was so important to them!

However, the simple fact is that ALL of those scenarios would have been avoided by use of backups. We all back up, don't we? Well, we may think we do, and that's the real problem.

Traditional backup methods fall into two categories, extra hard drives, and removable storage. So, what are the pros and cons?

Extra Hard Drives

Extra hard drives installed inside the PC case are a fantastic idea, especially when set up in a mirrored configuration. Files are copied automatically from one disk to another, and there's your backup. We routinely set computers, and especially servers up like this, but it's only one part of a backup plan. This method will protect you from corruption to the operating system, but your data is still at risk.

We have seen this arrangement fail because of fire, flooding, electronic failure and accidental deletion. And the replication itself might fail. Unless you are on top of your system every day, you will never really know if you have a viable backup. Good, but not good enough.

Removable Storage

In the good old days, we used to recommend removable storage. Generally, removable storage allows you to keep a copy of your files somewhere away from your PC. Normally that means backup external drives, USB memory sticks, recordable CD's and tape drives.

Leaving aside tape drives for one moment, let's look at the others on the list, and why they are no good for backups. Well, it's not really the systems which are no good, it's the operators, i.e. ourselves! Despite all our good intentions, we're all notoriously bad at manually running backups. Be honest, those of you with CD burners, when was the last time you burnt your files to disk? Probably never, because you can't amend the files once they are burnt, you lose the disks, you go away and someone else doesn't run the backup. The same with memory sticks and external drives. Memory sticks don't have much capacity; external drives are set right next door to the PC, thus are subject to the same risks and are very rarely used correctly.

This leaves us tape drives, used almost exclusively on servers. A tape drive has software that enables an automatic backup routine to run. However, the software is expensive, the tapes are erratic and difficult to use, need constant attention and require someone to change the tape every day. Up to now, we have used tape backups in the office, and must admit that we are only ever 99% sure that the tapes contain a completely recoverable backup. All the indications are there that we can, but there's no way to be sure..

Until now, those were our choices, which brings us neatly to YachtBackup.

YachtBackup – Safe, Secure Online Backup

YachtBackup's slogan is "Backups Just Got Better". And, they're right. YachtBackup offers an off yacht, online storage solution specifically for Yachts. It is ideally suited to a yacht with VSAT paying a fixed monthly subscription for data. After subscribing to the service, you open your account and install software

on the computer you want to back up. A Windows Explorer interface allows you to select the files you want to back up, you set your own encryption key, set the scheduler, and that's it. The software automatically compresses and encrypts the files and they are uploaded to YachtBackup's main storage server in Telecity Datacenter in the Netherlands.

Security is naturally a major concern, which is why YachtBackup chose Telecity. Telecity are ISO certified for storing and protecting data. The centre is monitored round the clock with CCTV and security guards. The same applies to the replication server (yes, the backup is itself backed up), at Schuberg Philis datacenter. The two sites switch seamlessly, so that whatever happens, you will always have access to your data. You can recover your files online. We did a demo where we did a backup from a laptop for an interested captain. We then simulated a theft (we hid his laptop!), got a brand new one from the stores, recovered his data to the new one and he was up and running again in minutes.

Your data is encrypted (scrambled) into code on your PC before it is transmitted. When it is transmitted the encrypted data stream is randomly sent to create an even more undecipherable set of gobbledygook. It is then stored in this format in the Netherlands, and only the person with the encryption key can unlock the coded data, i.e. you. Likewise, no-one can intercept it. If you lose the encryption key, YachtBackup cannot help you. This is considerably more secure than your tape drive, burnt CD or memory stick.

Another really revolutionary feature is the way the files are backed up – the first backup is the whole file, and subsequent backups are just the changed portion of the file. One advantage of this is that you can use this technology to restore the file to how it was on any date up to one year ago (according to the retention period you set) but also it only transfers changed data on each backup rather than everything, thus keeping the time and data transmission costs down.

And, best of all, it's fully automatic. You receive a daily email with a report for the backup, so you'll know immediately the status of your backup, and what's more, you'll enjoy great peace of mind knowing that you're covered.

It's difficult to say any more, because it's so deceptively simple and, well, it just...works.

We have been so impressed with YachtBackup that we have installed it onto our office servers and stopped using the tape drive. YachtBackup have asked us to take on the distribution for Spain and France, which we are very happy to do and many of our high profile and large network customers are using the service already.

Just one final tip. Whatever backup method you use, *please* check that it is working by doing a random restore once a month. Some years ago, we had a

client who had been religiously running a tape backup daily, a week end tape and a month end tape. However, one day their server crashed, destroying all their data. They were feeling pretty confident because they had all these tape backups...or so they thought! When they tried to restore, they discovered that ALL of the tapes were blank! Scary, eh?

If you would like to know more, please contact us

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