

# Backup Plan

Backing up your business's data might not seem as important as making sales, but without a proper strategy, you risk losing much more than sales if your data is compromised or lost.

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It was hard for Rob Emrich to justify spending money for anything that wasn't directly involved with daily tasks. The chairman and founder of Road of Life, a nonprofit that educates children on cancer prevention in Columbus, Ohio, stored all of the company's financial information on an external hard drive attached to the USB port of his server.

However, a year ago, Emrich came to work and discovered that he had been robbed. The computer to which the hard drive was attached was gone -- and so was the drive with all of his financial records. The employees of Road of Life spent the next two weeks unable to continue their business; instead, they had to re-build their database, pulling together paper copies of donation records and looking through old e-mails saved on personal computers.

Backing up a company's data may seem like a second-tier priority, particularly for small businesses looking to put all of their resources into generating immediate revenue or providing services, but in the face of a disaster, a business's backup files are all they have to keep the business alive. Without proper backup, data loss can keep a business from operating for weeks, even months, resulting in severely decreased productivity as staff members work to recover the lost information.

Right now, tapes are the most common form of data backup. However, with evolving technology, online backup services and DVDs also are becoming popular methods, and with the proliferation of inexpensive external hard drives, many companies are using them to create network attached storage that can be used for larger scale backups. It's also common for companies to combine the different means of backup, to ensure that their needs are met within their budget.

Here are some things to think about when comparing the different strategies for backing up your company's data.

- **Tapes.** Tapes are a very efficient way of backing up data: They are inexpensive and can store large amounts of data. For this reason, "they are the best option for long term, off-site archiving in high capacities," says Steve Berens, senior director of marketing and product strategy for the storage devices business unit at [Quantum](#), based in Irvine, Calif.

Data tapes operate similarly to cassette tapes in that the information is stored sequentially on a magnetic strip. This means that the files are saved in chronological order, so file retrieval is very convenient if a full recovery is required. In the event of a single file being lost, however, tapes are extremely inefficient because they require someone to rewind and fast-forward the tape in order to find the file. Like cassettes, data tapes require meticulous care; in extreme weather and humid conditions, tapes can easily be ruined and the data on them lost.

- **CDs, DVDs, and external hard drives.** CDs and DVDs have a number of advantages over data tapes: Storage and file-specific recovery are quicker, and these media are fast becoming ubiquitous. The problem with CDs and DVDs is that they can't store as much data as a tape can.
- **Attached storage.** An external hard drive, which can be connected to a computer through a USB port or attached to a network, also is a good, inexpensive option for storing data. The key to using an external hard drive, as with any data storage device, is to back up frequently and then take the files off-site. Experts recommend making duplicates of the hard drive and storing a secondary copy somewhere else, often in a different region, and occasionally in a different country. "Even if you're storing your data in the biggest safe on the planet, guess what? It's still just in one place," says Nishank Khanna, CEO of [UnderTag.com](#), an online coupon aggregator that had its own experience with massive data loss. "If something happens in that one place, all of your data is gone."
- **Online backup.** Online backup is still a relatively new option, but its popularity is increasing because backups can happen automatically, and typically only require a quick file setup. "Online backup is a lot more secure and reliable than other options because all of the data is encrypted," says Jennifer Walzer, founder and president of online backup service, [Backup My Info](#) (BUMI), referring to the ease of password-protection on online backup servers. Proponents for online backup also point out that because it is automatic, there is less chance for human error.

"We have a program (script) on our server that kicks off every 57 minutes and does a backup and a compression of several databases and then sends them to the off-site vendor's server," says Al Canton, owner of Adams-Blake Company, the makers of [JAYA123](#), a Web-based enterprise application for allows small businesses. "It also deletes previous backup files that are over 10 hours old," he adds.

The negative side to online backup includes its comparably high costs and speed of total recovery. Because back ups are done entirely over the Internet, your best bet for efficient backup and fast data recovery are to use high speed connections, such as broadband cable or a T1 connection. Dial-up connections are less than desirable for this method of back, especially if you move large amounts of data on a regular basis.

When considering what might be the best options for your company's data backup, keep the following points in mind:

- **Security.** Not only should you keep your records secure for your company's sake, but you should also protect investor and customer information. Data encryption, or making data unavailable without a password, is possible on each of these forms of data storage, including tapes. Make sure that even if your data is stolen, others won't be able to open your files.
- **Redundancy.** Canton notes that even though using online backup is fast, convenient and secure for his business, he uses more than one backup method to help guarantee the safety of his company's critical information. "Redundancy is the key for any backup scenario," he says. "We also do a daily backup to a third location; we make sure that no geographical location can have the same weather pattern as the others."
- **Testing.** Be sure to test how well your backup system is working by recovering a randomly selected file each month. This way you can be sure that your system will work when you need it to.
- **Plan for the unexpected.** Even if you keep your own office secure, there's no telling what your neighbors are up to. Despite how much care you take to keep your office safe from fire or theft, your neighbors might not be as diligent: A fire in an adjoining office can quickly turn into a major disaster for your business.

"Your computer is 100% guaranteed to fail," Walzer says. "The question is: Will you be prepared when it does?"

Making a data backup plan is as vital to your business as selling your product or service. Road of Life's Emrich learned this the hard way, but eventually decided on an online backup plan that would keep his organization from having to experience data loss disaster ever again. "The amount of productivity we lost from losing that information exceeds any price that we would pay for data backup," he says.