PC410

PC410: A Division of Science Translations
Managed IT Services, PC Service and Sales in Central Maryland

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What Didn't You Back Up?

by Jerry Stern

I've been reminding everyone to run image backups, usually called 'system backups' in backup software, for a while now. Those backups need to be taken off-site, either on a portable drive, or in cloud backup. But there's more to backing up than data. Backups are about disaster recovery, and that's such a vague term; it can mean recovery after a lightning strike or a hard drive failure (the most likely issues in central Maryland), or rebuilding computers that are no longer there. What you store on your hard drive will determine how easy it is to recover from a loss.

There are categories of information that most offices don't regularly convert to digital; adding these to your data files means that they'll end up in all your backups when you need them. Usually, you just need an 'Office' folder, and maybe a 'Technology' folder.

Store Directly on the Backup Drive:

First things first: Save the installation program for your backup software directly to your backup drive, along with the software license key if one is required. Second, in the backup software, usually under 'tools' or 'utilities', there's an option to create an bootable emergency CD for restoring files. Use that option to save a disk image instead of creating the CD; that will offer to create an 'ISO' file. Save the ISO; that is all that's needed to restore the backups from that program. Don't place these items in your data folders; they should be in a folder on the backup drive, because we'll need those items to read your backups and restore everything else. Using cloud backup? Create a local folder of these files, and set the cloud software to include it.

Add to Your Technology Folder:

Software licenses: Any software that you have paid for has some type of license, and usually a serial number or a product key. For each product, create a folder in your Tech folder, and scan or photograph the license key and/or serial number for each product, or save the email holding the purchase information–use PDF or EML format so we can read it easily. If you're paying for an online service that goes with that product, such as online access or backup, save the login information with the keys.

Software disks: Sometimes, when a software installation disk is lost, I can download a new one. And sometimes, I can't, because the publisher only supports the current version, or frequently the last three years' annual versions, and you're using something from the age of diskettes. Backing up important product CDs can be done either by copying all the files on the disk into a folder on the backup drive, or by creating and saving an "ISO" file using any DVD-burning software, like CDBurnerXP. That "ISO" stores the entire disc as one file, and can be used to create a replacement DVD or CD.

Add to your Office folder:

Key paper files: If you haven't scanned employee records, you should. You might also need these items before there's time to restore computers: Landlord contact information, payroll service account logins, and, of course, service provider contact information. (Like mine: 410-871-2877)

Serial numbers of all your stuff are important. If you take pictures of serial numbers on devices, you will have serial numbers, model numbers, manufacturer names, and sometimes the year each item was built. Include them with your photo inventory: In your office, take pictures of all four sides of every room, and don't forget to photograph your supply closets and racks.

Three!

And a reminder: Everything important should be in three places, two types of device, one off-site. That's documents, photos, license numbers, renewal information, lists of key people, everything in three places. Take it home, or send it

to cloud backup, but get one copy out of your office. Before the storm, please.

So What's all this about Black Swans?

A Black Swan is what you can't plan for. You might expect a blizzard, a flood, or a hard drive failure, but business planning based on birds that just won't ever show up? Yes, you should plan for the unexpected. Read more at the Startupware Blog:

So Who are these Black Swans, Anyway?
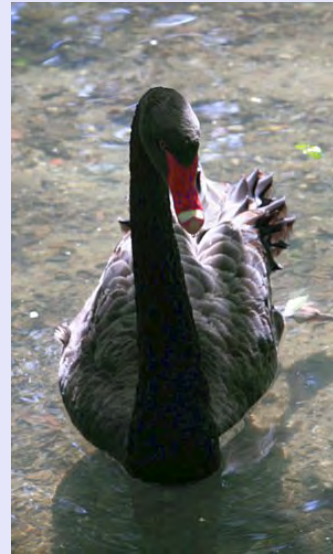
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