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Why Tape Backups Are Obsolete in Today's Schools

By Chris Schutte

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Most schools use tape to backup their important data. Tape is a form of magnetic media in a linear form, similar to VHS tape. It is not very quick or inexpensive, and is not extremely reliable. In the past though, it was just about the only form of removable media that had the capacity to hold an entire network's data.

To keep things reliable tapes need to be alternated in a rotation and then replaced about once per year. This costs quite a bit of money just for the media, not to mention the extreme prices for the drives themselves.

Tape drives are also very slow, and constantly need to be tested and monitored to make sure that they are really backing up and that the backups actually work. I have seen many cases with servers going down and the tapes being corrupt.

Today, there are many different forms of removable media. If you have purchased a hard drive or a flash memory stick in the last few months you have probably noticed that the cost of these devices has dropped significantly.

I recommend using external hard drives for backup. A 200GB drive can be purchased for about \$200.00. This is by far cheaper than tape. By using a rotation of multiple external hard drives you get a form of backup that is much faster than tape and can be taken off-site. The backups can be checked by just browsing the drive, similar to browsing your C: drive.

External hard drives work with most backup software, and some drives even come with their own. Switching from a tape based system to a drive based system normally requires very little modification to your current system.

In summary, external drives are faster, easier to verify, and much cheaper than tape. When it comes time to upgrade your schools data backup system do a comparison between tape and external hard drives. I think you will see that unless tape drive manufacturers makes some big changes they are

quickly on their way to becoming obsolete in the school market.

Chris Schutte is the author of "The Technology Director", a weekly newsletter that focuses on technology in K–12 schools. He is also the President and Founder of Premier Technology LLC, a technology consulting and integration firm. To sign up for his FREE newsletter go to <http://www.premiertechnology.net>.

The Seven Golden Rules Of Data Backups

By Keith Edmunds

Backups of company data are carried out for two main reasons. The first is to cater for those times when a document is inadvertently deleted or damaged and you wish to recover the original document; the second is as part of a disaster recovery plan in case something catastrophic happens to your computers (e.g., victims of a fire or theft).

Backups cost time, money and effort to implement, and they are of no value right up until the time you need them. This means they tend to be given a low priority, but ultimately they may easily represent the difference between your business surviving and failing. In this TipSheet, we look at the most common mistakes businesses make with backups.

1. Backup often

Re-entering data is tedious and frustrating. Backing up your company data once a week means that the most you should ever have to re-input is one week's worth. Backing up your company data once a day means the most you should ever have to re-input is one day's worth. Frequent backups lessen the impact of data loss.

2. Don't keep any volatile data on desktop PCs

In many organisations, documents are kept on the hard drive of desktop PCs. It is unlikely that this is backed up regularly, if at all. A PC can easily be replaced: last week's quotations may not be so easy to replace. In particular, check that email is not stored on the local hard drive (this is very common in small to medium size businesses). All documents, spreadsheets, email, etc should be kept on a central server, which is in turn backed up regularly.

3. Automate the backup process

Backups are tedious to do. At 6:30pm, most people would prefer to set off home or join colleagues in the bar rather than stay in the office to find the correct tape and start a backup. Automating tedious tasks means they get done.

4. Monitor the backup process

While automating backups is a good idea, do check that they are running correctly. Make sure new

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files are being backed up; make sure the files of new users are being backed up. A quick check once a week could avert a much more serious problem later.

5. Keep backups offsite

If your business premises suffer a fire or flood, it is likely that backup media will be lost as well. Fireproof safes only protect media for a given time, typically one hour – if you use one, check the

manufacturer's specification. If you always keep your backup tape in the server then when it is stolen the thief will probably throw the tape away. It's worth nothing to him, but it could represent bankruptcy to you.

6. Produce a "backup recovery" manual

A major disaster is not the time to try to remember how to recover data from your backup media. Have an idiot-proof, step-by-step procedure written – with a copy stored off-site – detailing how to reinstate your company data.

7. Test the recovery procedure periodically

Without warning, give the backup recovery manual to a member of staff and see how long it takes them to recover data. Many organisations never do this! No one involved with creating the manual or the backups themselves should be involved in the test. The results of the test should be analysed and the manual updated accordingly. A recovery test should be carried out at least twice a year. This proves both that the backups themselves are usable, and that your organisation understands how to use them if necessary.

Keith Edmunds has been helping companies get the most from their IT investment for over twenty years. He is the Managing Director of Tiger Computing Ltd (

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Data Recovery Made Easy

Creating Secure Online Backups

CD Backup Made Easy

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