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Think your tape drive is a smart way to back up your data?

Last week we had a not too infrequent request from a Newtownards based industrial cleaning company requesting a restore of their SAGE data. It seems that they had somehow overwritten their data with an older version. No problem with that though as the No. 2 cause of data loss, at 11% of likely causes is down to human error. We restored the previous night's offsite copy and all was well with the world again. Oh and by the way, the No. 1 cause of data loss ? at 78%, is hardware or system malfunction.

Looking after approximately 70 backups on a daily basis, it got me thinking though about the 'Merits of an Offsite Backup' where your data is stored to an external data repository versus the more traditional 'Onsite Backup' which is done in your office to a tape or an external hard drive.

I am fortunate to have a bit more information on Offsite v. Onsite as our Help Desk sends me a daily reminder that reports on the 'success' or otherwise of our clients backup. Over the past year though I can see that we have had way more issues with the onsite approach as opposed to the offsite.

True, Hard Facts About Offsite Backups

From our own experience I have found that:

Fact 1: The average failure rate of disk and tape drives is 100%. Incredible, isn't it. Most people don't realise that ALL tape drives and hard disks fail at some point, why wouldn't they? They are electrical/mechanical devices after all. What's really dangerous is that most companies don't realise that their tape drives have failed until after they try, only 34% of companies do test restores, to recover the data stored on them. Only then do they realise that the backups stopped working long ago or the data is corrupt and can't be restored.

Fact 2: Having a copy of your data on a tape backup or in some other format does not guarantee a fast recovery of your data. Most businesses don't realise that a data backup doesn't include all your applications and personal settings. If you had to restore your entire server using your backup data, then you would first have to re-install all your software programs and configure the settings. Only then could you install all the data – the entire process can easily take several days. In these situations we can now do something call a 'virtual backup' and restore far quicker but more on that in a future article.

Fact 3: If you keep your backup onsite, it could be worthless to you in the event of a fire, flood, theft or even a power surge. Smart business owners always keep an offsite copy of their data.

One final piece of advice, whilst we find overall that an automated, offsite backup is more reliable, it removes the human need to remember to change onsite tapes/drives, having any backup whatsoever is better than none. Just don't find out the state of your backups at the time when you absolutely must have them back.

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