

# Small Business Connections

PC Tips For Small Business

Presented By

## On-Site Support

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## Keeping Your Data Safe

By Mike Miller

It is always amazing to me when I visit small businesses around this area how many of them do not have a solid backup plan in place for their valuable data. This data is the heart and soul of your business and should be treated like gold. Data can be lost in many ways. Hard drives can fail. Viruses can corrupt your system. Files can be mistakenly deleted. Disgruntled employees can erase all of your data just before they quit. Any of these occurrences can cause irreparable damage if your business does not have a good backup plan in place.

### Getting Organized

The key to backing up data is to consolidate it in one place so that it can be backed up efficiently. Many small businesses have a server of some sort, whether it is a Novell or Windows NT/2000 dedicated server or simply a peer to peer server on a Windows 98 system. Administrators should create a central location for data on the server, such as a Users folder with a subfolder for each user. Strongly encourage or require users to save their data to that server folder, and then backup the server. Microsoft products usually default to saving all documents to c:\My Documents folder of each individual PC. To change this default location, click on the Tools—Options menu in most Microsoft products. By changing the default file location from c:\My Documents to f:\users\johndoe (or whatever is appropriate for your system), all of the user documents in your office can be consolidated in one location, making backup much easier.

### What to Back Up?

When planning backups, you must first decide what to backup. The amount of data you choose to backup determines the type of media that you need to use. When choosing, think about what information is essential to the operation of your business. By backing up only essential data, the size of the backup and the amount of time needed to run it can be reduced. Remember that programs can be re-installed from the original CD, so it is not necessary to run a full backup of your Program Files folder every night.

### Backup Hardware Options

Once you have determined how much data to backup, you need to decide what hardware and software to use. Backup devices range from the good old-fashioned floppy disk to 120 GB external hard drives. For many small businesses, Iomega Zip disks are an excel-

lent choice. These can now hold up to 750 MB of data, enough for many small businesses. Another option is the CD writer. Most new computers are coming with CD writers these days and they can be added to older systems for \$75 or less. A CD can hold 680 MB of data and the disks cost less than 50 cents each.

If the backup exceeds 750 MB, a tape drive or removable hard drive will be needed. For most small businesses, a Travan type tape drive is sufficient. This type of tape drive costs less than \$250 and holds up to 40 GB of data. Another good option is a DAT tape drive. DAT drives are very fast and can hold up to 240 GB of data. They cost more than Travan, but offer improved speed and greater capacity. An external USB or Firewire hard drive is a fairly new option for backing up data. These drives are available for \$160 and up and offer capacities up to 120 GB. The disadvantage of using an external hard drive for backup is that it is not as easy to take off-site as a tape or disk.

### Software Options

There are many backup software options available. All versions of Windows include a basic backup program. This program, known simply as Windows Backup, can backup to just about any type of media and generally works well when performing manual backups. However, if you want to run scheduled backups, it is best to use third party software. While Windows Backup does support scheduled backups, I have often found that users have problems getting it to work properly. To perform scheduled backups on a Windows PC, a product called *Backup My PC* from Stomp Software is available for around \$65. If you want to backup a Windows NT/2000 or Novell server, *Backup Exec* from Veritas Software or *Arcserve* from Computer Associates are good options.

### Testing The Backup

Running a backup does no good if you cannot use it to restore data when needed. Administrators should periodically perform a test restore from their backup media to verify that data can be restored.

### Taking It Off-Site

No matter what option you choose for backup, the one thing you MUST do is to take your media off-site. In the event of a catastrophe such as a fire or tornado, your backup tapes will do no good if they are destroyed along with the computers. Hardware and software can be replaced, but data cannot. A tape or disk should be taken off-site at least once a week, if not daily. It can be kept in a bank lock box or just taken home, but having an off-site backup is crucial to your business in the event of a disaster.

I hope that this article has encouraged you to think about your company's data and how to protect it. Doing so can mean the difference between staying in business and having to close in the event of a disaster.

## On-Site Support

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*If you would like more information on the topics presented in this newsletter, or any other area of interest, please give us a call at 864-583-8588. On-Site Support offers free consultations to help small businesses get the most from their technology.*

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## Refer A Friend and Get a Free Lunch!

Like many small businesses, On-Site Support relies heavily on referrals from current and past customers for new business. For this reason, we are starting a new program to encourage our current friends and customers to help us find new ones. If you refer a business customer to On-Site Support and that business becomes our customer, we will send you a \$20 gift certificate to any restaurant of your choosing in Spartanburg. You don't even have to take us with you!

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## Staying Ahead of Viruses

*By Mike Miller*

Computer viruses have been around nearly as long as the personal computer. Early viruses were often spread by sharing floppy disks, which usually limited their distribution to a few victims. The emergence of the Internet and proliferation of email in the latter half of the 90's made it much easier for viruses to spread to literally millions of computers in a few days. Viruses can be very expensive for businesses to deal with. For a small businesses, a single PC infected with a virus can cost \$1,000 or more in lost employee productivity and paying for a technician to eradicate the virus and rebuild the PC

The best way to protect your PC from virus infections is through a combination of anti-virus software and careful use of email. Norton Anti-Virus and McAfee VirusScan are the two most popular programs. Both can do an excellent job of protecting your system if used properly. Besides these well-known programs, there are a number of smaller companies in the market. One that I have found to be both excellent and inexpensive is Panda Anti-Virus. This is available on-line at [www.pandasoftware.com](http://www.pandasoftware.com) for \$39.95. It is a very small-footprint program that automatically updates its virus signature every day whenever you are connected to the Internet.

Whatever software you choose, it is practically useless unless you update your virus signature files regularly. Most current versions of anti-virus programs have the ability to automatically update themselves from the Internet. Since new viruses come out nearly every day, you should update your signature files at least once a week, if not daily. When you purchase anti-virus software, it usually includes a 1 year subscription to updates. Annual renewals usually cost around \$25 per computer. This

may seem expensive, but it pales in comparison to the cost of eradicating a bad virus. Once you have anti-virus software installed, be sure that it is configured to run at start-up and to automatically scan your email. To be safe, a weekly full scan of your PC is a good idea. Since this can take up to an hour to run, it may be best to schedule this to run during off hours.

To avoid getting viruses on your PC in the first place, be very careful with your email. Viruses can disguise themselves as friendly messages or jokes from people you correspond with regularly. Since many viruses have the ability to forward themselves to everyone in the victim's address book, it is easy to get viruses from your friends and colleagues. Be especially careful with email messages that contain attachments, as clicking on the attachment can load the virus onto your system. If you suspect that an email contains a virus, be safe and delete it without opening the message. For even more protection, I have found a free software program that allows you to preview your email before it is downloaded to your computer. It is called Mailwasher and is available at [www.mailwasher.net](http://www.mailwasher.net). This program allows you to preview your email while it is still on the server and flags suspected viruses and spam, allowing you to delete them before they ever reach your PC. Mailwasher provides an extra layer of protection against viruses when used properly.

Staying ahead of viruses can be challenging, but for small businesses, the cost of not doing so can be significant. By following the tips provided in this article, you should be able to keep your system virus-free and concentrate on the important things—like running your business!