Globe+Mail Thurs. July 15/99

Don't wait for costly crash before backing up PC



E-BIZ

JIM CARROLL

When Joni Mitchell sang "you don't know what you've got till it's gone," she wasn't talking about data stored on a computer. But the same maxim applies.

Most entrepreneurs don't think about backing up their personal computer until they've lost a file that's extremely important. That's when they slap their forehead and wonder, "why didn't I have a copy of this stored somewhere?"

Computer downtime and particularly the loss of important files can be a significant, costly problem. A recent study by International Data Corp. of 800 Canadian and U.S. companies — including 200 small businesses — found that about 60 per cent had suffered lost revenue and 40 per cent lost productivity when confronted with system issues, 90 per cent of which were caused by hardware and software problems.

Running around trying to recreate data, retyping information or fiddling with damaged data on a crashed hard disk can divert you from more productive tasks. And don't think it can't happen to you: In the past month, I've had two hard disks crash, lost one extremely important file to corruption and have had other problems. Fortunately, I had adequate backup and was able to quickly get back all but a few of the lost files.

What can you do to minimize damage from computer problems? First, become a back-up zealot. Understand that you're going to lose data on a regular basis under a variety of circumstances. To counter that, you are going to make multiple, redundant copies of that data and store several of them off-site.

Second, make sure that you have some type of tape-based back-up capability. There's no shortage of low-cost back-up devices on the market. You can get a tape drive that will store gigabytes of data for a few hundred dollars. Get this type of device and use it often.

Third, consider "burning" some of your most important archival files onto a CD-ROM, particularly those that don't change over time. At a cost as low as $400 for a CD recorder and about $2 for a blank disk, you can make copies of vital information to retrieve later.

Fourth, consider using an Internet-based backup service for some of your important work in progress. I've been using @Backup (**www.backup.com**), a service which allows storage of up to 100 megabytes of data for an annual fee of $99 (U.S.). Every night, a software program on my PC encrypts E-mails and documents and sends copies to @Backup via the Internet. To ensure that I've got duplicates of duplicates, I've been using InterBack (**www.edgepub.com/iback**), a program that allows automatic copying of various files to another off-site storage location on the Internet as well as to one of my Linux servers.

Fifth, test your various back-up options to ensure you can get at much-needed files. It's a miserable experience to find a back-up copy of a file is inaccessible.

If things go really wrong, and you don't even have a backup, you may want to contact CBL Data Recovery (**www.cbltech.com**). It deals with situations where data was lost because of mechanical or electrical failure, virus activity, system malfunctions, accidental erasure or reformat, damage from water, fire or smoke, or file corruption.

I sent it an extremely important database file that was corrupted, which contained about eight hours of work added since the last backup. The file was returned without any data lost within two days.

Jim Carroll is co-author of Small Business Online — A Strategic Guide for Canadian Entrepreneurs, *and can be reached by E-mail at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com*