

Online Backups: Which Program is Right For Your Business?

You may wonder why you should consider online back up of your files when you may already have invested in adequate back ups on an external hard drive or tape system; we have the answer. Have you ever given thought to what would happen if you had a fire or flood at your office and all your equipment was ruined? This is one of many reasons that a small business should consider off-site back up in addition to their in-house system; but there much to consider before making a purchase.

Online backups have moved from the back office to the front office. Through TV advertising and catchy phrases, online backup products and programs have exploded into the market. Differences between the programs include the pricing model, backup technique, technology, and scheduling, as well as ease of recovery. With so many choices, how do you select the backup program that is right for your business? We will explore these answers in a two part "Tech Talk" concluding next month.

Here are some basic things to consider in evaluating online backup program: Online backup became feasible with the widespread availability of high speed internet access that pushed the speed of local area networks and made it possible to easily backup large quantities of data. With these products, software is downloaded and installed on the computer so that its data can be backed up. The software setup is normally simple, and it requires little user input. Many of these software packages will automatically pick document, music, and picture files for backup. After selecting the files to be backed up, a schedule of when the backups will be done must be established, and the user must also determine how many copies of a file to retain. Many programs automatically default to 10 copies of a file. It is important to be selective and careful when deciding how many copies of a file are needed: the more copies, the more online storage space and memory is needed. All of the products on the market perform these basic tasks, but that is where the similarity ends.

Protecting data from prying eyes while it is "en route" to storage to the online service and during is storage there is critical. The typical storage configuration involves creating a secure login and password and an encryption key. The software will use that information to identify the account and to encrypt the data for transport and storage. Encryption protects your data while it is being moved across the Internet and while it is being stored remotely. If you are looking at an online backup solution that does not include encryption, you should pass on it. It is important that you make sure to safeguard the account login, password and encryption key because many online backup vendors don't keep copies of this information and cannot open the backed-up files. The good news: your data really is safe from being hacked into. The bad news: if the key is lost, the data cannot be recovered.

Prices for online backup service products range from "free" to \$6 or \$7 per gigabyte of storage. Be careful when comparing these product offerings because the pricing method can lead to widely different results. Carbonite and Mozy have similar pricing models. Both charge a "per computer" fee as well as a "per gigabyte" charge. Online file storage for Mozy and Carbonite is measured in RAW file sizes, not the compressed file size used in services like Wright BackUp. The "per computer" fee can quickly add up, making these "free" or seemingly low cost offerings more expensive than services like Wright BackUp that charge by the gigabyte of compressed storage. Mozy and Carbonite also require purchasing more backup space than you need, and stop backups when you reach what you have paid for.

The backup technology is also important to consider. First some "geeky" speak – brick level backups. Think of every file being made of "bricks" of data. Why backup a whole file if only one

word changed in one of the bricks in the file? The more sophisticated software packages, like Mozy and Wright BackUp Version 3.0, employ brick level backups rather than full file backups. If only one “brick” changes, only that brick is backed up. The software is smart enough to be able to reassemble the “brick” to create versions of the file. This saves bandwidth, backup time, and online storage space.

Depending on the system being backed up, scheduling backups can become a problem. During the backup process, the computer that is being backed up needs to be left on to perform the backup. The initial backup can take many hours depending on the bandwidth available. Most backups are scheduled at night when the computer is normally not used or is turned off. Other packages allow for “real time” backups: by monitoring files that should be backed up, the software notices when a file is created or changed, and backs it up. “Real time” backups have advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is not worrying about scheduling a backup. Disadvantages include the backup slowing things down by using processing power and Internet bandwidth while you are working, as well as an increase in the copy count due to backing up the many changes a file may go through during the business day. The frequency of these “real time” backups will have a direct impact on system performance and online backup storage totals.

None of the current online backup products provide for full system backups, or system state backups to assist with disaster recovery. Online backups are for data files only. They cannot backup or restore full systems, and they cannot be used to recover application software like Word, Excel or QuickBooks. In order to back up the full system for disaster recovery, a local backup to tape or disk is still needed. Online backups are also no substitute for data archives. A data archive is a snap shot of the data at the point in time that it is retained. Archives are often needed to meet regulatory requirements for document retention, and they are often invaluable in recovering lost files in the event of a system failure. External disk backup still provides the most reliable and cost effective method for archiving customer data. The key to success in picking the right online backup solution is fully understanding the data being backed up and meeting backup objectives. Online backups can be a part of a comprehensive backup plan that includes provisions for full system recovery and archiving.

For more information or to discuss your online backup needs, please contact John Kalli at 732-780-8615.

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Marshall Wright of Decker Wright Corporation is a collaborative partner of Trinity Worldwide Technologies in providing technology information to small and medium size businesses via our e-newsletters, blogs, and websites.