

Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 19

“Oh No”

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for the Observer

I don't spend my entire day looking at a computer screen (really); I wouldn't have made the move from the big city if I preferred working under artificial light. Having a “smart-phone” was a huge liberation from my constant check-ins and email exchanges. These are the tools of my trade. I am quite aware the amount of time I **do** spend on my own computers is likely far in excess of most folk.

This weeks' topic is about backups and disaster recovery. This isn't a primer or a lesson plan, but it's essential to both your sanity and the survivability of the information stored on your computer or your business computers.

Backing up data has gotten much easier, and unlike many software applications, backup utilities can be easily configured. Some caveats:

- Static data (pictures, videos, documents) can be backed up at anytime.
- Dynamic data should only be backed up when the application is closed.
- Backed up data requires verification, or its validity cannot be confirmed.

Why the distinction? Pictures and other static file formats can be quickly and easily verified: copy them to another computer and open a sampling. Dynamic information often exists in a database of some sort within a given application or software package. Quickbooks is one example, and almost every retail “Point-of-Sale” solution another.

Wikipedia describes a **database** as an organized collection of [data](#).^[1] It is the collection of schemas, [tables](#), [queries](#), reports, [views](#) and other objects. The data are typically organized to model aspects of reality in a way that supports [processes](#) requiring information, such as modeling the availability of rooms in hotels in a way that supports finding a hotel with vacancies.

This distinction in data types is important in a backup routine. Backing up any application with a database component requires a static state, e.g., no table updates (or expensive backup solutions beyond the scope of this audience). I often have clients set their Quickbooks to automatically back up company files when the application is closed, and I encourage a target location for these QBB files to a folder which will be backed up, automatically, at least once a week.

Automatically = the magic elixir to solid data for Disaster Recovery testing. Whatever the backup utility you use (there are too many to list), and regardless of the backup destination (external drive, USB key, CD/DVD, Cloud storage, NAS, etc.), the data backed up **must** be tested once in a while. Pictures, documents and videos are easy, as noted above, but what of your Quickbooks or Point-of-Sale information?

With Quickbooks, a simple email of the QBB file to your accountant or bookkeeper should suffice, they will let you know if the Company files you sent are good or not. With other

applications, a bare-metal recovery test needs to be created, processed, and validated to ensure, when something happens, you can quickly recover and continue your business. Finally, for any user of a commercial software application (Point-of-Sale or other industry specific software), if you've not spoken with your software support team of late, call them, ask them what they offer for backup services. In most cases, their incremental charge to backup YOUR data may well be less expensive than any hardware or cloud based alternative. Best part of a vendor integrated solution: you probably won't need to engage your IT consultant to have valid backups created and accessible should an equipment failure interrupt normal operations.

Backup data as often as it changes, and schedule a periodic disaster recovery test. Review all aspects of your backup process: when, how, and where.

- When: anytime your network of computers or workstation is idle
- How: Backup utility of choice (Windows, Time Machine, Syncbak, MyBook, etc.)
- Where: USB, External, NAS or Cloud

Remember to test, and practice, data recovery **before** a disaster happens. Review and replace any backup device over three years old, review the health of your NAS. Call your software vendors (specialized), and ask them what to backup and whether or not they provide backup services.