

The Ten Minute Killer!



Mark Boersma

Most of us have had that sinking sensation when the power goes off on our computer and we lose thirty minutes worth of work. Feelings of frustration, anger, and a loss of control, flood over you in that moment. Several software packages now include features which automatically save your file every "x" number of minutes ... but that is not what this article is about.

It is about something much more serious which can cost thousands of dollars, unrepairable damage, and even put some companies completely out of business. It is about properly and safely backing up your computer.

Do you remember those fire drills you used to have in grade school? When is the last time you had an unexpected fire drill with your whole computer going down?

The following are some of the most common mistakes made in relation to backing up one's computer:

- 1) Just not doing it.
- 2) Backing up periodically rather than on a consistent basis.
- 3) Having only one backup tape.
- 4) Not taking the backup off site.
- 5) Not testing to insure that a good backup has been achieved and retrieval is possible.
- 6) Not permanently archiving backups.
- 7) Not placing proper security on the backups.

While there is not one "right" way to perform the backing up of computers, there are some things you can do to insure the best protection of your business.

Off site: Make sure you are taking some of your backups off site. If you do not and there is a fire or theft your backups will do you no good.

Frequency: How often should you backup? The answer to this question is to ask another question. How much data can you afford to lose? On a home computer that the kids use you might be able to back it up quarterly. The portable computer you use to run your business probably should be backed up at least weekly — maybe even daily. Business computers probably should be backed up at least daily.

Whatever frequency you use, it is best to be consistent. For your home computer, maybe the first day of every month. Your portable computer could be done the last thing on Friday before you leave work. The office computer could be done every evening. It is best to have the same person do the backups with one or two others knowledgeable on how to do it and able to check to make sure it is being done.

Rotation of backups: Rotating your backups is the best way to insure that your data is secure. Four to seven backup tapes is recommended. If you are doing daily backups, this gives you one for each day of the week. There is additional safety if you have a couple of weeks and rotate those weeks. One might find themselves in a situation where data from two weeks ago is needed. If you overwrite those tapes that data is no longer available.

Backup tapes are so inexpensive that additional protection can be achieved by doing a permanent archive four times a year. This will give you the ability to "lock in" what you have if you ever need to go back and get data from a few years ago. It is also ideal to complete full backups rather than partial backups. If you need to restore your whole system it can be much more difficult to try to retrieve it from multiple tapes.

Not testing backups: It can look like you have a backup. But how do you really know? The backup tapes should be tested periodically to insure that you can retrieve files from them. Some large companies randomly test their systems going down.

Security: Who has the responsibility for the backups? Who has access to those backups? The information on these tapes is often the life line of a business. Backup tapes may contain sensitive information about personnel or information about your client base that you would not want your competition to be able to access.

How long does it take to get things up and going again? How much time will be lost? These are questions which are good to ask prior to the "fire" happening. Make sure you are not caught off guard. It could mean the difference between the life or death of a business. ■

Mark Boersma is the president of Synergy Solutions, Inc. Synergy develops comprehensive, custom business systems, goal setting, and numerous marketing/sales products to assist individuals and companies in reaching their potential. Mark can be reached at (630)393-9909.