

Backing Up To The Future

When I visited the Physics Department of the University of Buffalo the other day, I got a chance to test their time transport machine prototype. When I, and several other IT professionals, went to the year 2020, this is what we found.

- War is illegal everywhere on earth. So is professional boxing and toy guns for children.
- All societies have outlawed the manufacture of any food product that doesn't meet nutrition standards. No one with whom we talked had heard of potato chips, pork reins, chicken wings and Little Debbie's.
- No fossil fuels are used and airports have become spas built around transporter rooms. Instead of using jets, trucks and trains for transport, people and material goods are basically, in a way, FAXed to different destinations by way of transporter rooms. (Remember Star Trek?)
- All computer data is backed up automatically without anyone even having to think about it.

Because of the New York State budget cutbacks, we were only allotted five minutes in the time travel machine. The most impressive of the technology was the data backup.

A writer for *PC Magazine*, *PC World* or *Network World* (I can't remember) recently said 'Everyone usually emphasizes backup. What's most important is recovery.' That's certainly more to the point. We can invest and come to trust in backing up our data but none of it matters unless we can reliably get that data returned to our work flow when we want it. *Have you restored any of your backed up data lately?*

"Well, no, . . ." we might sheepishly admit as we look down and paw the ground with our foot. But we come back, saying: "I'm doing the work of 5 people, doing more with less and I don't have the time to play with restoring backups and doing other experiments until a real disaster happens" speaking this time with a little more confidence to our questioner.

"But then, again, do you really want to be facing a disaster AND the inability to get your data back at the same time?" the questioner says with even more confidence and force, looking us right in the eye with hands on their hips and the body posture of a black belt Six Sigma Master?

With or without a time travel machine, we are actually able to use effortless data backup now. It's just that not that many people know about it. Here's the scoop.

Those of us who do most of our work on our network have data automatically backed up to a tape drive. If the administrator faithfully changes tape and periodically tests the backups, we are fine. **If!**

Then there is the luxury of being able to work from home or a remote site, getting on to our work server by way of a Citrix session. This allows us to virtually be at our desks at work (as if we were actually there) and access our work.

Dilemma

But suppose the Citrix server happens not to be available and we can't get at our work? Suppose the tape backups haven't been tested and now the server is down. It needs a new drive and the controller card is on a 3 week back order. The files, on which you've been working, need more work now and are due tomorrow!

The good news is that you don't have to wait for the year 2020 or access to a time travel machine to have the core of your most important work files in your hands from a remote site. Now is when you can be working on important time-related files on which you and your colleagues are working. You don't have to be solely dependent on your company's file and print and Citrix servers and tape drive backup management. If the server is down, you can just go home and do your work.

Scott Dunn at PC World provided a helpful summary of synchronization services in August of 2008. Among those covered were *Syncplicity*, *BeInSync*, *SugarSync*, *Dropbox* and *Live Mesh*. Microsoft's *Life Mesh* is impressive and free, right now, but it doesn't synchronize files and folders on a network drive. Neither does it do versioning of the copies as does the *Dropbox* tool.

Syncplicity is deemed best of the lot and I can testify to that. You designate as many folders as you want, anywhere on your network, and when you are home or on another computer accessing the internet, you find them there as well. (Full review is at:

http://www.pcworld.com/article/149060/syncplicity_file_sync_service.html.) *Syncplicity*'s free application gives you 10,000 files or 2 GB of storage. A basic \$10 per month subscription removes all limits and sets the storage maximum space to 40 GB with additional 50 GB amounts for \$10 more.

Obviously backing up your company work to an offsite computer would have to be approved by your company network administrator, the Department of Homeland Security and the ghost of the FBI's late J. Edgar Hoover. But if you get permission, you can keep doing your work 24 hours a day, regardless of the reliability of your company backup system.

Someone once said that in a person's dying week, he or she won't be longing to spend just a few more hours at the office. They won't be if they have access to their files at home.

Home Non-Network Backups

If you happen to be as paranoid and neurotic as I am about backup – *I haven't seen you in group therapy lately* – why not back up your work at home to an external hard drive. This would avoid a subscription to a 'cloud' or Internet service where your material is stored and accessed through your internet account to the server holding your data. It would also save you from purchasing a tape drive and having to change tapes every day. Local external hard drives are perfect for home computers (not on a network) except for those rare occasions when your house burns down or is swept away to Kansas by a tornado.

The advantage of a local external hard drive is that if you have to reformat your drive or buy a new one, all your files (perhaps even your drive image if you do it) can easily be copied back onto your newly formatted hard drive without going through the internet. Of the external hard drive backup solutions I've looked at, I finally settled on Seagate's *Free Agent Pro*. I use their USB 2.0 & eSATA 750 GB drive that constantly copies work on my home drives to the external drive. I can share some or all of it with anyone. (Review at: http://www.pcworld.com/article/129566/seagate_freeagent_pro.html) This \$350 product is so easy to use and reliable that that I bought one for our household and our daughter's in LA.

. . . Philip Siddons

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