

Have you ever had a question about anything labeled "IT" and asked someone you thought was "IT savvy" for an answer, and after hearing the answer you felt just as confused? If you have, welcome to my club. The IT world has become a land with its own language and lingo and even its own jokes. This article is not written in ITish(the language of IT land) and does not have idioms that only the ITans(the citizens of the IT world) understand. Well, that's the goal at least.

Is My Backup Solution Adequate?

*One of my biggest pet peeves is when someone who is considered an expert in their field makes up a statistic on the spot, and because he is an "expert", it is presumed to be fact. The **fact** is that the statistic was made up on the spot and therefore not factual. Some of you may have heard the statistic that says that 80-93% of companies close doors 2 years following catastrophic data loss. That might scare you into buying a more expensive box with lights on it, but what should actually determine whether or not you need to fork over more dough for a better backup solution are a few simple questions, and not a made up statistic.*

The first question is does my current backup solution work? Backup solutions have become common place among businesses. However, if you were to ask the owners or managers if they could actually retrieve the data if the need should arise, many will say it's a matter of crossing their fingers and hoping it works. That is not an adequate backup solution. You need to be sure that it works and take action if it doesn't.

There are a couple things we can do to check to see if it is working or not. We can check the backup log (No this is not ITish, it's a simple log just like the captain's log James Kirk used on the Enterprise. It's a simple record of actions such as whether or not backup is happening and when, along with any errors that might have occurred). If the log says the backup is happening and no errors have occurred, then all that remains for you to do is to attempt to retrieve some archived data. This may require the help of an ITan, but it shouldn't be costly because all you are trying to do is access random data to ensure it is being backed up correctly.

It is always a great idea (and worth the extra money) to find a backup solution that notifies you every time a backup occurs and every time it doesn't. If you are putting the weight of your company's future existence on the shoulders of a little box, you better know that it is doing its job. Make sure your backup software notifies you when a backup occurs and when there is an error.

Remember that if you want backup to function correctly you need to test it periodically to make sure it works properly. It's man-made so it won't function at 100%, 100% of the time (Yes that is a statistic and yes I did just make it up, but it sounds about right, right?).

So after testing your backup two things can happen; it works or it doesn't. If it works, great! Give yourself a pat on the back and keep reading. If not, it's now your turn to act like an ITan or to call a real one in order to figure out why it doesn't work. Don't just jump to the conclusion that you need a new backup if your current one isn't working. Sometimes there are minor issues that once resolved permit the backup to function just as you would expect.

The next step is to determine if the backup is giving you the accessibility you need. This is where a little self-reflection comes into play. First of all, ask yourself, "Is the info I am backing up just in case of a catastrophic system failure, or do I need to access it frequently?" If you simply back up your data in compliance with the rules from the all-knowing people on capitol hill, then most likely you don't need to access the data very often and a simple external hard disc (external= not inside the computer; hard disc= storage box that has a format that is extremely difficult for non-ITans to interpret) backup will work great. It will provide a cheap backup solution and give you the peace of mind you are looking for.

If you need constant access to the backed up data then you will want to spend more money on a backup device that gives you easy access to the files. The only downside being that typically these devices (device=metal boxes with lights on them that somehow perform a specific task you want them to) cost a lot more dinero than the previously mentioned external hard-disc devices. But they store a lot more data and offer easily accessible data storage (you win a little and you lose a little). Make sure that if you fall in this category, the device you chose specifically states that it allows quick, easy access to stored files.

Performing these routine maintenance chores will help you kill two birds with one stone. The two unfortunate birds being that when you perform the maintenance you not only learn whether or not it works but also the necessary steps to restore archived data if a disaster ever occurred. A wise man once said, "Hope for the best but plan for the worst."

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