Vaulting is best practice for data backup plans

by Suzanne Thornberry | Published in Tech Republic : 9/24/02

Best practices approach includes vaulting

Chris Caprio, data center solutions manager at Imation and a board member of AFCOM's Data Center Institute, said that low-budget approaches to off-site backup storage are inadequate for even small organizations. Instead, he recommends a "best practices" approach that includes contracting with a company that specializes in tape storage.

"Off-site vaulting works for any organization—you don't have to be a 500,000-tape library, enterprise-class shop to take advantage of the benefits that an off-site vaulter can provide," Caprio said.

When shopping for a vaulter, Caprio recommended that you consider these factors:

- Theft deterrence
- Fire protection
- Flood protection
- Environmental control
- 24-hour access

"You can dictate, as the customer, the contract that fits your needs best," Caprio said. For example, you may specify a two-hour response time for the service to deliver a tape from the vault to your IT department.

Vaulting can also help you avoid some liability issues. "When you have your own couriers that are doing the transfer—or one of your own employees is taking it to someone's house—you're at risk," Caprio said. "The tapes could be stolen or there could be a fire in a manager's home." In addition, some insurance companies may offer lower business insurance rates if you store tapes in an off-site vault.

Rates are reasonable

Caprio, who used to manage the data center of a $4 billion company, said the off-site vaulters he's worked with have been "exemplary." And he says rates are reasonable. About two and a half years ago, Caprio's department sent thousands of tapes to storage each week. The vault service charged about 10 to 12 cents per tape per month for storage. "It was not outlandish by any stretch of the imagination." Although a smaller company wouldn't receive such a great volume discount, even $5 per tape per month could be cheap insurance to keep your business up and running.

"Data is the lifeblood of any organization—whether it be a mom-and-pop grocery store or a medical office, all the way up to a Fortune 50 company—and any loss of data at any level is really unacceptable," Caprio said. "In the case of off-site storage, I've never come across any reason that justifies a risk to deviate from a best practice."

Making the case for vaulted backups

When budgets are tight, it can be difficult to win approval for any added expense. Here are two approaches that may help you explain why vaulting is a cost-effective precaution for your company's data.

TechRepublic member **wrlang**, a disaster recovery administrator, noted that it can be hard to get the money for backups into the budget. An IT leader may have to get approval for this expense from a CFO or finance director who may simply compare the cost of off-site vaulting to the value of the media, rather than to the value of the data. He suggested that a quick business impact analysis can help you make the case for off-site storage. "This can be as simple as taking your company's total sales and dividing that number by the number of days in the year to give you the value of a day's worth of data," wrlang wrote. "This is a gross oversimplification, but it can turn the light on for many managers."

Your media costs may also be lower because vaults will provide the proper temperature, humidity, and handling to achieve the optimal lifetime from tapes. Caprio said to check with the manufacturer's recommendations to find out how many passes your tape can be expected to take. Some tapes, for example, may be tested to perform error-free for over 20,000 passes, while others may only test to 2,000 passes. The best idea, however, is not to rely on those ratings but to analyze your tapes to see if they produce errors. Citing statistics from the Enterprise Storage Group that up to 60 percent of backups don't execute properly in network environments, companies like Bocada offer products to analyze backups across a variety of platforms and pinpoint any failures.