



Need to Know

The Art of Backup a philisophical view

You only need to backup data if it has value. For most people this will be the case, so learning “The Art of Backup” is a necessary skill. The aim is to achieve our goals in the most efficient manner possible.

The purpose of backup is simply to allow you to restore data. All things going well you should never need to restore but this doesn't mean that you shouldn't restore.

Once you have determined you need to backup you need to determine exactly what to backup. You want to backup data that has value. You can define “value” in a number of ways.

- If the loss of data means that you will be unable to ever recover the information, then that data has value. Think of digital photographs. If they are lost you may never be able to replace the images again. The information the files contain has value.
- If the loss of data means that you will have to spend a significant amount of time recreating the data, then that data has value. Think of financial spreadsheets. If they are lost you can recreate them but it is going to cost you time to achieve that. This time has value.
- If the loss of data means that you will be unable to fulfill your obligations, then that data has value. Think of payroll information. If that is lost you will be unable to pay your employees which may make you liable. The function that the data performs has value.

Now that you know you have to backup and what data you want to backup the next challenge is how to backup it.

There are multitudes of mediums to actually backup your information onto and you should use the one that gives you the fastest operation for the cost you can afford. The only proviso is that all the data you want backed up should be stored on a single media. Having to change media creates complication and wastes time.

Now that you have your valuable data stored on backup media you now have two copies of your valuable data. You need to ensure that a single catastrophe, like a fire, doesn't wipe out both copies. Therefore you need to ensure that one copy of your valuable data, usually the backup, is stored at a different location to that of your original data.

If the purpose of a backup is to restore then you want to make sure that a restore is possible. To ensure you can restore from backup you have no choice but to restore. You don't want to find that when you need to restore you can't because of some failure of the

process has occurred. To minimize risk you need to restore data from your backup to another location as a test regularly.

Over what time period do you need to be able to retrieve your data ? If you want to be able to recover data up to twelve months old then you will need to maintain backups for this period. This sounds simple but is quickly overlooked.

As wise people say, any “Art” is not a destination but a journey. You must continue to refine and improve on the “Art of Backup” all the time, it requires constant work and attention however the rewards are significant when compared to the disaster of losing important information.