

Backup in the Modern Law Firm

By Ernie Svenson

Backing up your digital data is crucial for obvious reasons, and yet many law firms aren't performing backups or aren't doing it properly.

Some lawyers don't back up their data because they feel lucky and believe that a hurricane, earthquake, or terrorist attack will never strike them. Those lawyers are failing to consider the high incidence of mundane catastrophes such as hard-drive failure or equipment theft.

Backing up data isn't difficult anymore, so today's lawyers have no excuse for not doing it correctly.

The key elements of proper backup

A proper backup system will:

- Duplicate key data on all devices (not only computers)
- Export to a secure off-site location
- Continuously back up data throughout the day or as changes are made to files

In the past, IT professionals were responsible for performing backups. Today, anyone

can fairly easily set up a reliable backup system that runs automatically, not only for computers but also for mobile devices.

For example, iPhone users can use Apple's iCloud service to create reliable, continuous, off-site backup for minimal cost. Android users can do the same.

Backing up computers using a cloud service is simple and inexpensive. Services like Carbonite,¹ CrashPlan,² or Backblaze³ allow you to back up your computer data for a fixed monthly cost, typically \$50 per year. You can get business-class backup services at a reasonable cost as well.

Automatic and foolproof

The best reason for using cloud services is that setting up an automated backup is practically foolproof. Once the backup is configured, it occurs automatically as long as the computer is connected to the Internet.

In fact, the prevalence of high-speed Internet has made it possible for reliable off-site backup to be easy and affordable. And all top-tier, cloud-based backup services offer sufficient security (i.e., encryption).

You should carefully read the terms of service of cloud-based providers before uploading client data. A great resource is the American Bar Association's cloud-ethics chart,⁴ which will help you determine if your

state has ethics rules regarding the use of cloud services for storing client information.

What about Dropbox?

You should also be aware that many popular cloud-data services offer backup. For example, Dropbox users are continuously and reliably backing up their data to a secure off-site location.

Dropbox, Sugarsync, and Google Drive are often thought of as mostly file-synchronization services. But synchronization is possible because they store data in their cloud-based servers. That means data is also being backed up.

And services like Dropbox also allow you to restore files that were altered or deleted. They also permit you to easily share large files by sending an e-mail recipient a special link instead of trying to send an attachment that would likely be rejected by Internet service providers because of size.

These services have become popular largely because they solve many different problems at a low cost. Dropbox's straightforward interface also helps explain its popularity. But the focus here is on reliable backup, and Dropbox is another way to accomplish this, although you'll have to upgrade to the paid version (\$99/year) to ethically use it to store client files. You may also

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want to add a third-party encryption service like Boxcryptor,⁵ which costs approximately \$48/year.

Let's be clear: I'm not suggesting you should use Dropbox as a substitute for dedicated backup services. The takeaway is that cloud services like Dropbox (or Sugar-sync or Google Drive) give you extra protection, i.e., an additional backup system. And frankly, it's often easier to restore data from Dropbox because it creates an exact copy of your folder structure.

Conclusion

The prevalence of low-cost cloud data storage means that having redundant backup systems is simple and affordable. If you're not backing up your data (or doing it properly), you should take immediate action to remedy that deficiency.

It's never been easier or cheaper to back up data than it is today. The modern lawyer has no excuse for losing data. ■

This article first appeared at www.paperlesschase.com on April 15, 2015.



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Bootcamp.com, he helps lawyers transform their practices into something so efficient they virtually run themselves—teaching them to tap “automation power” to slash costs, boost profits, and outmatch opponents in larger firms.

ENDNOTES

1. Carbonite <<http://www.carbonite.com>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed July 19, 2015.
2. CrashPlan <<http://www.code42.com/crashplan>>.
3. Backblaze <<https://www.backblaze.com>>.
4. American Bar Association, *Cloud Ethics Opinions Around the U.S.* <http://www.americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/legal_technology_resources/resources/charts_fyis/cloud-ethics-chart.html>.
5. Boxcryptor <<https://www.boxcryptor.com/en>>.

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