It's Severe Weather Season... Do You Have A Disaster Plan?

Perhaps it's just me, but this spring has been one of the worst I can remember in terms of severe weather. The flooding and tornadoes we're seeing around the country should serve as a wake-up call for small business owners to review their business continuity plan.

Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, southeast Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

A disaster recovery plan prepares a business to deal with disaster scenarios such as fires or tornadoes that disrupt the business's operations.

Although larger companies create such plans as a standard operating procedure, small businesses tend not to do this type of planning.

In fact, according to Symantec's 2011 SMB Disaster Preparedness Survey, only 50% of small businesses have a plan in place for a disaster or data loss.

Your disaster plan serves two purposes. First, the plan should limit the financial impact a manmade or natural disaster has on your company.

Second, the plan should establish the steps you will take to begin operating again quickly following a disaster. Developing the plan and making employees aware of it helps protect your business and mitigate risk.

Plans should name specific employees that will play key roles in the event of a disaster, and identify critical assignments that each employee must complete in a disaster scenario.

Finally, the plan should focus on keeping your company's irreplaceable data safe. That data includes customer information, email correspondence, sales information and accounting and financial records.

Most businesses our size don't have the resources to implement redundant office locations, but the plan should include a strategy operating at an alternate location.

The resources needed to resume operations within 24 hours of a disaster may differ from those needed to resume operations within three to four days. The plan should call for the minimum set of resources possible to meet the established targets.

We've put together in a free report that will help guide you through the planning process - from assessing the risks to setting up in a new location. The report is free - simply call the office at (734) 457-5000, or email info@MyTechExperts.com for your copy.

Disaster Planning For Small Businesses

What Every Small Business Owner Needs To Know About Protecting Their Company's IT Systems

TECH EXPERTS

For your FREE copy of our report, "Disaster Planning For Small Businesses" call our office at (734) 457-5000, or email us at info@MyTechExperts.com.

Need help? Call the Tech Experts 24 hour computer emergency hotline at (734) 240-0200.

Five Microsoft Office Add-ins Help Improve Productivity

If your company does any type of word processing, data spreadsheets, or even use email then you probably know the benefits of having Microsoft Office.

Did you know that you can enhance your experience by using third party add-ins? An add-in is a mini program which runs in conjunction with a web browser or other application that enhances the functionality of that program.

Here is a list of add-ins for the Microsoft Office Suite. Keep reading to learn about some of the add-ins available to make your everyday tasks easier!

Duplicates Remover for Microsoft Outlook

Duplicates Remover is a powerful and flexible plug-in for Microsoft Outlook intended for the search and deletion of duplicated items in Microsoft Outlook folders.

Duplicates Remover can search in single folders as well as different folders for any duplicates.

Duplicated items can then be set to automatically be copied or moved to another folder of your choice, marked with a flag letting you know that item already exists somewhere in another folder, or simply deleted.

Microsoft Mathematics Add-In for Word and OneNote

Microsoft Mathematics Add-in for Word and OneNote makes it easy to plot graphs in 2D and 3D, calculate numerical results, solve equations or inequalities, and simplify algebraic expressions in your Word documents and OneNote notebooks.

Microsoft Mathematics Add-in can add a little extra help when planning your budget for next year, or simply create great visuals using its graphing feature.

SendLater for Microsoft Outlook

SendLater is an easy-to-use and

convenient email scheduler with a recurring email option. It allows you to schedule automatic email, follow up and handle your email correspondence in a timely manner even if you are away from your computer.

It also allows you to send a delayed group message as a single email to all recipients or use the "Send personally" feature to conceal any information about other recipients of the same group message.

In this case the recipient will only see his/her name and address in the To, CC or BCC fields, as if the message has been sent to the recipient personally.

Ultimate Add-in for Microsoft Excel

The ultimate Add-in for Microsoft Excel includes a general collection of over 90 different utilities and more than 30 custom written func-

tions to help make life with Excel a little easier. Ultimate Add-in will allow you to customize the menu to bring all of the menu settings in one place to easily show / hide the items you want.

Ultimate Add-in can also optimize your workbooks, rebuilding the whole data spreadsheets and saving the components to a series of files and reloading them into a blank sheet. Serious file space can be saved by using this utility.

Attachments Forget Reminder for Microsoft Outlook

Attachments Forget Reminder is a powerful Microsoft Office Outlook Add-In. It scans each outgoing email and if it finds any of the specified key phrases (e.g., "see attachment" or "in the attached file").

If no file is attached to the message, the program will give out a notification. It then asks you if you meant to attach a file before sending the email, giving you a chance to insert the attachment. The add-in works with Plain Text, RTF, or HTML based email formats.

There is many more add-ins that you can install to improve functionality within the Office suite programs, these are just some of the few I like.

Go ahead and search online for yourself and see if you can find some good add-ins that makes your job simpler!

Feature article by Terrell Canute, Service Technician at Tech Experts

Windows Updates... What, When, Why?

Windows Update can be confusing. Microsoft throws a lot of stuff at you, often with little information.

And somehow you have to figure out what you really need, what you might like and what Microsoft wants you to have for their own purposes.

It doesn't help that most of the updates have totally useless names. Without looking it up, can you tell me why you may or may not need Windows Vista (KB950124)? I can't, either.

Unfortunately, if you don't keep up with the patches and security fixes for your version of Windows, you run the risk of not only being more vulnerable to a malware attack.

Hackers are always looking for security holes in operating systems and application software to gain access to your computer.

There are many types of updates that can be available for your server or workstation and in most - but not all - cases you will want to install them.

A lot of updates come from Microsoft. Another source is hardware providers that may have made some of the hardware in your computer (like video cards, sound cards, network interface cards, Etc.)
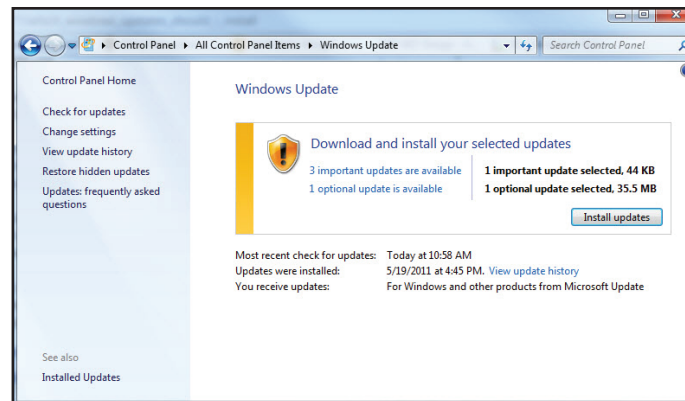
Updates can come from other software that you install to do your work or make your computer run better (like Adobe Reader and Adobe Flash).

The updates that come from Microsoft generally offer more features to a product installed on your computer such as Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, or even Windows itself.

Windows Update also delivers very important patches that correct issues with the operating system and could potentially allow hackers access to your files or anything accessible on your computer.

This can include devices that are connected to your computer such as

your router, printers, external hard drives, network attached storage, etc. This can be a serious security risk if your computer is on a network domain.

Gaining access to a user's computer that has administrative rights to various aspects of the network or server would allow hackers to do much more damage than on a PC you use at home.

In a business setting it is an absolute necessity that you keep your server/workstations up to date with all security patches that are appropriate to your environment.

Just as it is very important to keep your operating system up to date, it is also very important that you keep your programs up to date.

One of the most abused programs in regards to gaining access to users' computers is Adobe Flash and Reader.

These programs are patched regularly to prevent attacks. Since Flash is used on many websites, and Reader is used for many business documents, you almost certainly have them on your computer.

Recently, Adobe announced a vulnerability discovered within its Flash software that allowed hackers to connect remotely to your computer and use Flash to control every aspect of your computer.

This has since been patched (as long as you updated your Flash player), but it just goes to show how easily your computer can be compromised if you do not keep it up to date.

There are times that you may not want to update your software. One example, and there are many, might be your video card drivers.

You may not want to install this update unless you have a specific need.

Sometimes, updates of these type can cause hardware to malfunction and there are times where the update is designed to fix a specific problem. If you don't have the problem the update fixes, you probably wouldn't install that update.

If you have any questions, feel free to call a tech today at 734-457-5000.

Feature article by Frank Wright, Service Manager for Tech Experts

Twitter 101: A Beginner's Guide To Tweeting Responsibly

Thanks to Charlie Sheen, everyone is talking about Twitter. Whether you love him or hate him, you have to admire his uncanny social networking skills and ability to generate some buzz.

In a nutshell, Twitter is a social media oriented micro-blogging site. A typical Twitter update - known as a "tweet" - might provide a quick update on what you're doing or request help with a problem., all in 140 characters or less.

That's "micro-blogging." You can send updates from your PC, a cell phone, PDAs, tablets. How can Twitter be useful and how to sign up?

Twitter for fun and family

To use Twitter in your personal life… Keep your friends and family updated on your life when you don't have the time or inclination to call or e-mail. You might tweet, "We arrived home safely from our trip" or "the car's running again. It was just a fuse."

Real life tweet: A passenger on a plane that skidded off a Denver runway last winter used his cell phone to tweet about the event moments after it occurred.

His friends never had to worry about his safety, because they got his tweet and learned that he was unharmed before the incident was reported in the media.

Arrange social activities, even at the last minute. Rather than place dozens of calls to find someone who is free, send out a single tweet. This tweet might read, "I'm going fishing. Anyone want to join me?"

Real life tweet: Basketball Star Shaquille O'Neal used Twitter to inform his friends and fans that he was sitting down to dinner alone in Phoenix. A pair of local basketball fans drove to the diner and hung out with him.

Solicit opinions, advice or assistance on short notice. You could tweet, "Can anyone suggest a good place for dinner in Albany?" or "My car broke down in Portland. Can anyone recommend a good mechanic?"

Twitter for business

To use Twitter in your professional life… Keep colleagues and clients up-to-date about schedules and plans. You could tweet, "Any customer expecting a service call today will receive one by 5:00 p.m. despite the snow" or "My flight was delayed. Can someone stand in for me at this afternoon's meeting?"

Search for tweets about your company, industry, or products written by other Twitter users, and then provide fast feedback.

A plumber might offer responses to plumbing-related questions to build goodwill with customers. A manufacturer might respond to a complaint about a product with troubleshooting tips, turning negative buzz about the company's customer service.

For example, cable company Comcast has a customer service employee monitor Twitter for mentions of Comcast and respond quickly.

The website TweetBeep (http://tweetbeep.com) and Twitter's own search page (http://search.twitter.com) can help find relevant tweets.

Show clients and potential clients the person behind the business. Customers are more likely to trust you if they believe that they know you and like you as a person.

To build this human connection, tweet about your hobbies, your charitable work, or your company's softball game, in addition to your business and products.

How to sign up

Twitter is easy to use. Visit www.twitter.com, click "Get Started-Join!" and follow the simple directions. E-mail a link to your twitter web page to keep friends, family, colleagues and clients posted on your life or business.

You can find people to follow by clicking on "Find people" from your Twitter home page.

Warning: Click "setting" then check the box by "Protect my updates" on your Twitter account page if you want to maintain control over who reads your tweets.

Leave this unchecked only if you do not expect to share sensitive information and would like to reach strangers as well as friends.

Always be careful. If you are going to be out of town for a few weeks, you may not want to tweet about that everyone can read your posts.

You can also choose to receive tweets from individuals on your cell phone. Though Twitter is free, your service provider may charge you when you send or receive messages from your phone depending on your plan.