

## New Year's Resolutions For Problem Free Computing



*Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, south-east Michigan's leading small business computer support company.*

Even though we're a few weeks into the new year, it's not too late to take a look at your company's network and make a few resolutions for better computing

in 2012. Here are a few suggestions.

### Better backups - now!

Implement a better, more reliable backup system to ensure your critical business data is properly protected. If you're still using tape drives or not employing the latest professional-grade backup software, there's no bigger New Year's resolution that you should have.

You should have both an onsite and offsite backup of your data that allows you to restore files fast. Your backup should also be image-based, not just file-based.

Data loss can happen from human error, hardware/software failure, fire, flood, theft or other disaster. Every hour that you're without your critical business information could cost you thousands of dollars.

### Check out the cloud

Is cloud computing right for you? In many cases, parts of your IT infrastructure can easily be put in the cloud to save you money and give you better service. It is important to talk to someone who can honestly assess your situation and tell you the pros and cons of making the switch to the Cloud. It's not for every business but it's worth exploring closely.

### Dump the old PCs

I know that no one really likes spending money on new computers but think about how much unproductive time your staff spends waiting for their slow machines.

You can get an entry-level business desktop now for as little as \$600, and speed upgrades to newer machines are very reasonably priced. What's the cost of staff sitting around waiting for their computer or dealing with computer problems?

### Upgrade your server

New servers are light years ahead of the ones made three, four and five years ago. Your company is less productive and less profitable with a server that slows everyone down.

### Change your passwords

Most businesses regularly have employees leave, including those

who were involved with supporting the computer network. Changing passwords regularly will improve security and protect your valuable customer and business data.

### Perform a security review

We're seeing all sorts of increased threats from hackers these days and you need to make sure your security approach is up to date. There are many parts to your security that you should examine including password strength; anti-virus software; and getting a strong firewall that will prevent intrusions, attacks and other malicious activity.

### Keep up with your preventive maintenance

Downtime and annoying IT problems can be prevented with regular maintenance on your computers and network. If you're not doing this now, it's time to start!

### Start the year right with a full audit of your network to develop your IT plan for the year.

Our top of the line network audit is a 27-point review of the security, performance and reliability of your network, and includes a full hardware and software inventory, plus checks on the health of your server, firewall, and network backup.

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## Data Management: From Storage To Security

One of the most important aspects of maintaining a smooth running safe and secure network comes down to data management.

How you or your company manages its data is important because if managed improperly, or not managed at all, you risk losing years of important confidential data due to failed hardware or even worse, theft.

Data management needs to begin with an audit of your various assets and how they should be managed properly.

This is the first step because you need to know what you have to manage and more importantly how it needs to be managed (can you use a simple flash drive backup, do you need a NAS, how secure does the data needs to be, should data be encrypted, etc.)

An audit should take place at the beginning of your data management plan as well as at the end which will be touched on later.

During your data management audit you need to first lay out what data is being used, when it is in use, when your slow periods are, and how securely you need to store this data.

For example client credit card data requires much more security than say your pictures from the company party.

After establishing what data you have as stated above you need to separate it into its various classes.

Generally people will store all of their data together so if that is your plan, you need to plan your security based on your most important and confidential data sets.

Some people may have a very large amount of data and smaller data sets that need more extreme security.

In these cases backup sets can be separated to allow less confidential data to be backed up to a less secure and much cheaper backup device while you could have a more secure setup for your confidential data.

One major consideration when it comes to backing up your data is encryption.

The stronger the encryption on data the longer it will take to recover in the event of a data loss.

Encryption is one of the best methods to store data, determined by level of security - it can be high or low.

Again the amount of encryption contributes greatly to recovery time. Data can be managed and stored in many different manners.

Some of the various storage solutions are; a network drive to another computer, a NAS, a flash drive, an external hard drive, data drives and tapes, offsite backups, etc.

Depending on your needs and the amount of recovery time needed, your choices can vary.

For instance, if you have 1 TB of data you are backing up chances are you would be doing an onsite backup rather than offsite to decrease down time in the event of a crash.

A terabyte of data in an offsite backup is going to take a very long period of time to download to your server if your only recover option is to download from the Internet.

A much better solution for this amount of data would be a data drive like a "REV" drive. A REV drive in combination with good backup software offers plenty of space to backup and encrypt your data.

Backups via tapes or data drives should have at least the previous night's copy taken offsite each night to ensure that you keep one data set safe at all times. It is a horrible idea to store all data onsite.

After you have a plan in place, run through the audit again once things seem to be running smooth to see what is in place, how its running, how secure it is in the event that a data set is stolen, and is the backup time/recovery time acceptable.

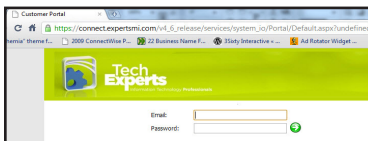
If the answer to any of these questions makes you feel your backup solution may be inadequate, it may be a good idea to try something different.

Even though it would cost more money to change data management solutions, it will save you money and hassle in the long run if you find it does not meet your company's needs.

For a full data management audit give us a call today and we can happily sit down and discuss with you possibilities for your backups and data management as this only touch on a very small portion of data management.

Your data is very important and generally people do not realize just how important it is until they've either lost it or had it stolen due to poor management practices.

*Feature Article Written By:  
Frank Wright*



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# How Strategic Business Continuity Planning Can Prevent Losing Money And Customers

The concept of business continuity planning is nothing new to conscientious business owners.

Without a doubt, the ability of an enterprise, large or small, to recover from catastrophic events and continue to provide an acceptable level of service to its customers while maintaining a satisfactory level of profits is a basic requirement of good business practice.

Although such awareness has always been a feature of good management, the startling events of September 11 2001 has brought the world into a heightened state of preparedness for disaster.

## Why the need for continuity and disaster planning?

Increasingly, natural disasters continue to surface in one place after another.

Consider recent major floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, corporate crimes and malicious attacks upon computer systems in nation after nation and you will sense the pressing need for sound business continuity planning to avoid disruptions due to technology and other failure.

Another factor which contributes to this need is the changing business climate in view of the expansion and increasing accessibility of the Internet over the past decade.

So organizations which formerly rendered services to their customers during fixed hours of business, now find themselves offering their services on an extended schedule, even 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This means that customers have grown accustomed to this ready access to their suppliers and vendors. And now the reality is that consumers have become less and less tolerant of interruptions in a company's service and availability.

## Business continuity planning - is it just for big business?

Business continuity planning now takes on an increasingly important role, not just for larger enterprises, but for small businesses alike.

In fact for small businesses it is even more critical to be ready to respond to the needs of its customers.

Customers expect this and have no problem locating alternate suppliers who stand ready to take your place in the market!

This is true whether you are in the manufacturing or service business, marketing and sales or any other facet of business.

## Your network - a key component in business continuity

Nowadays a company's IT System with its network of computers has become the backbone of many businesses.

Vital functions such as Data Processing, inventory and payroll management, Internet based operations including online sales, human resource and training systems, project management and an almost endless variety of other business functions are critically dependent on the efficacy of your computer system.

Clearly then, any technology disruption can have disastrous consequences.

Therefore business continuity planning often deals extensively with maintaining a dependable IT system.

This brings into focus not only the hardware components of the system and its



application programs, but also the data contained in the system.

## Ways to ensure continuity

Some of the key components that determine system reliability include Data Storage Devices, UPS systems, power generator systems and so on.

And nowadays, Cloud Computing is being relied upon to extend the reliability of Computer Systems and ensure business continuity in the event of major failure.

There seems to be a tendency to use the expressions 'business disaster

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## Take A Smart Approach To Social Networking For Kids

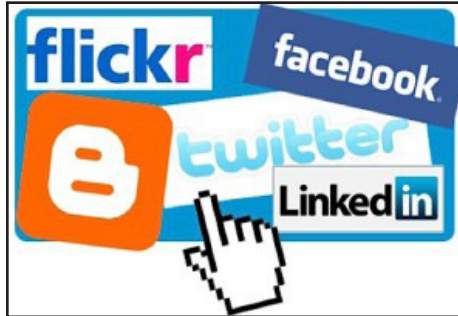
You can't escape social networking these days: Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus, and all their online cousins are everywhere. If you've got kids, chances are they're eager to join all their friends in cyberspace.

Worrying about their safety is natural, but hoping social networks will go away isn't very realistic.

You're better off working with your children so they don't hide their online activities from you. Take these steps to help them enjoy social networking safely:

- Start with kid-friendly sites. Facebook is far from the only place for people to go. A quick Internet search will help you locate lots of sites just for children. You'll want

to investigate them thoroughly, of course, but they can serve as a good introduction for your children to the world of online networking.



- Talk about privacy. Have a serious discussion with your kids about guarding their personal information online. They should understand that data like their full names, address, phone number, school, and birth date should be kept private for their own protection.

Emphasize that once something is posted online (a message or a photo), they can't remove it entirely even if they delete the information from their profile.

- Choose a secure password. A password that your child can remember easily may be simple for a hacker to guess. Come up with a password that includes a mix of letters, numbers, and capitalization so it's less vulnerable to attack.

- Encourage children to talk to you. Tell your children to let you know if someone online does anything to make them feel uncomfortable. If necessary, report the person to your site's administrator. At the same time, talk about the need for your children to treat everyone with respect, online as well as in the real world.

## Business Continuity, Continued From Page 3

recovery', and 'business continuity' interchangeably.

However upon closer examination it becomes clear that the two concepts are quite distinct.

Continuity of service is the desired state we want to maintain while recovering from any unexpected calamity whether an extended power outage, Computer System failure or other problem.

Such continued operation calls for a comprehensive plan that covers the most probable occurrences.

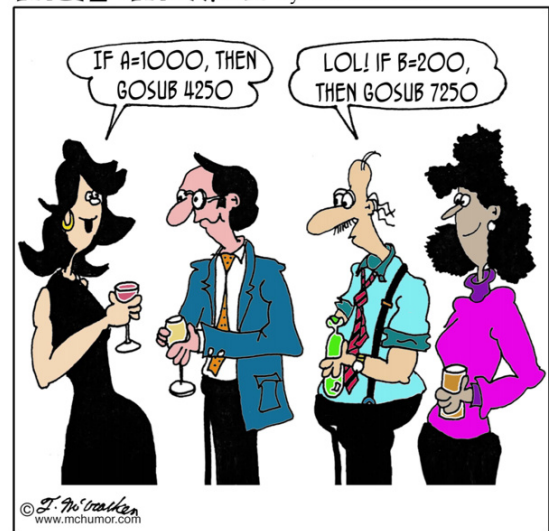
From this information it can be seen that ensuring business continuity calls for a strategy regardless of the size of the business.

As disasters continue to increase in frequency and magnitude, more and more careful thought must be given to your company's preparedness to respond in the event of any business threat.

The increasingly prominent role of computers in business calls for highly reliable data backups,

hardware redundancy, and keen, effective planning as a way to ensure business continuity in the event of any catastrophe.

**MCHUMOR.com** by T. McCracken



Programmers at a cocktail party.