Springtime Brings Seasonal Storms - Protect Your Network!

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

It's a topic I touch on every year around this time - the criticality of power protection and backups for your network. The sad fact of the matter is, no matter how often I preach about it, too many of our clients still aren't adequately protecting their systems.

Adequate power protection entails three things: Prevention, protection, and testing.

Prevention

During thunderstorms, many people leave their computers unprotected. Simply turning a computer off during a thunderstorm does nothing whatsoever to protect the computer.

Nearby lightning strikes can cause surges through the power lines or phone lines into your house or office, and these often damage your equipment.

The easiest way to prevent problems caused by lightning and power surges is to unplug your computer during a storm. Don't forget to unplug your phone line or cable Internet from the computer too. These are the second most likely way for surges to get into your computer.

Protection

Having a good, quality surge protector is great for the day-to-day power surges that happen mostly unseen in the background. Don't skimp on your power protection.

The $9 "surge strip" you can pick up at a hardware store simply gives you more outlets to use - it doesn't provide protection against power problems.

A good surge protector should run you around $50 - a small investment when you consider the cost of the computer and the value of your data.

Servers and critical workstations should be protected by a battery backup system. We prefer APC because they offer an equipment insurance policy, but any good, well known brand will protect your network.

Testing

Power protection devices, whether a surge protector or battery backup, are designed to fail. They absorb the power fluctuations that could damage your server or workstation.

Your battery backup unit should be tested at least twice per year to ensure it's functioning properly. The test can be as simple as plugging in a lamp, and disconnecting the unit from utility power. The lamp should stay lit. If it doesn't, it's time to replace the batteries in the UPS.

In general, surge protectors and battery backup units should be replaced every three years. This ensures your network, servers and computers are protected by the latest technology in surge supression.

FREE REPORT

We've put together our best tips and suggestions for protecting your network from dangerous spring thunderstorms. For your FREE copy of our report, "What Every Small Business Owner Needs To Know About Computer And Network Power Protection" go to:

www.ComputerBatteryBackups.com or call the us at (734) 457-5001.

What Every Small Business Owner Needs To Know About Computer And Network Power Protection

From the Desk of: Thomas Fox
                    Tech Experts

Dear Colleague,

Have you ever lost an hour of work on your computer?

Now imagine if you lost days or weeks of work – or imagine losing your client database, financial records, and all of the work files your company has ever produced or compiled.

Imagine what would happen if your network went down for days where you couldn't access e-mail or the information on your PC. How frustrating would that be?

Frustrating... And expensive! According to the National Lightning Safety Institute, computer damage and data loss from lightning strikes costs US businesses almost $2 billion annually.

Spring is here, which means thunderstorm season is right around the corner – there are at least 100,000 lightning strikes per year across the United States. Just one strike somewhere close to your home or office can seriously damage your computer or entire network.

If you're not properly protected, power problems will cause permanent damage – either to your equipment or your data. The only way to deal with these potential problems is to prevent them from happening in the first place. Here are some steps you can take to greatly reduce the chances of power problems that can cause data loss

• Install a high-end, line interactive uninterruptible power supply (UPS) on every server. With the proliferation of inexpensive "stand by" UPS units, such as the ones you can buy at office supply stores, business owners are realizing a false sense of security – these cheap UPS units can actually do more harm than good.

"Don't let power problems destroy your valuable server, workstations or data. Follow my tips for safe computing during storm season."

Thomas Fox
Tech Experts

Tech Experts • 1206 S Telegraph Rd, Monroe, MI 48161 • (734) 457-5001• www.MyTechExperts.com

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

Windows 8, A Diamond in the Rough?

Feature article by Frank Wright
So should you be planning to upgrade to Windows 7 or hold off for Windows 8?

If you're still running Windows XP, Microsoft is saying to not bother waiting for Windows 8 and jump into Windows 7. That being said, from a business point of view should you wait for Windows 8 or go for Windows 7?

Windows 8 was initially released as a developer preview on September 13th of 2011 and since has been pushed very hard by Microsoft and the media alike to many IT professionals.

After Microsoft boasted over the drastic rethinking of Windows 8 and how it has revolutionized Windows as a whole, IT pros everywhere picked every aspect of Windows 8 apart.

Is Change A Good Thing?

Many feel it is not going to make a very good business operating system for end users. The reason for this? Change. Windows 8 brings a vast amount of change to the table, some good, some not so good…

After the release of the Developer preview and several months of time for Microsoft to further polish their new Operating System, they released the current version Windows 8 Consumer Preview build 8250 on February 29th 2012.

Microsoft again touted the newly improved OS citing it has made over 100,000 code changes since its previously released Developer version.

So, just what is Windows 8? Well Windows 8 is Microsoft's attempt
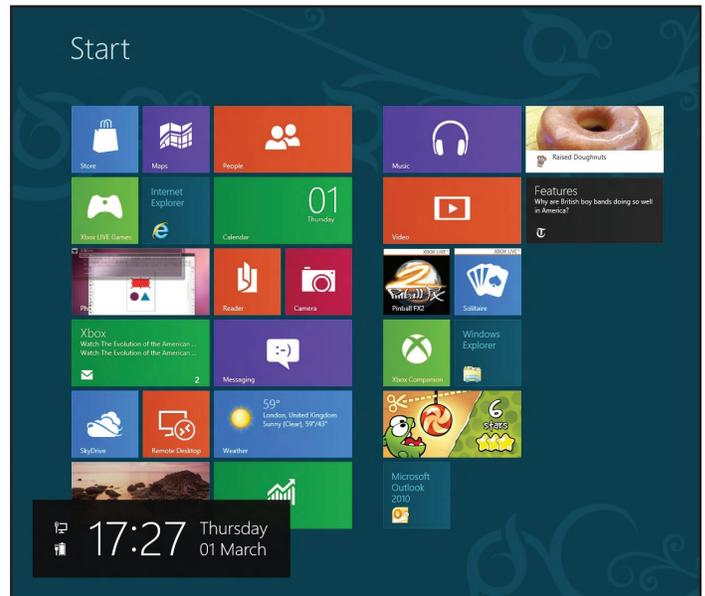
The Windows 8 desktop and Start menu have been optimized for tablet and mobile devices, and those desktops with touchscreens.

at making an operating system to bridge the hardware gaps between mobile platforms and the widely used PC.

Complete Overhaul

Windows 8 has been completely overhauled to give end users a similar user experience whether they are sitting at their desktop computer, using it on a tablet, or (as some experts believe) using a new Windows phone.

While Microsoft has not officially stated that this OS is going to be released on the Windows phone platform yet, it surely would not take them much to do so and would allow them to have their devices all synced.

Synced? That's right! The new OS relies heavily on the cloud. The way this operating system has been developed it will allow users to login on any computer (provided they have an internet connection) and have the same application access they had on their computer at home.

With further integration of cloud services users will also have access to all of their documents, pictures, and videos via cloud based storage.

Many of Windows 8 features have a long way to go still before they are developed enough for everyday public use.

Metro Interface

One of the most notable features of Windows 8 is its new "Metro" style interface pictured above

This screen is your start menu now. Yes, Microsoft removed the start button that has been in Windows for more than 20 years… This new way of accessing your icons and applications allows you to click on (or touch if you have a touchscreen monitor or tablet) an icon and instantly be using it.

Load times for applications are very low, at least with the applications that have been released via their app store at this point.

Why You Should Avoid Using A Debit Card When Shopping Online

If you shop online (and these days, who doesn't?), you'll want to make sure you use a credit card instead of a debit card to protect yourself from online scams and rip offs.

The biggest advantage credit cards offer is a buffer for payment. By law, your maximum loss if your credit card number is stolen is $50, and most credit card companies and banks will cover the entire cost.

When you use a debit card, the funds come directly out of your bank account, which means you might have trouble disputing the charge if you get scammed or if you are not happy with the product or service you purchased.

Here are some other tips to make shopping online safer:

Research your merchant before buying. The Federal Trade Commission maintains a web site (www.consumer.gov) that provides many buyer's guides, lists of tips, and links to helpful resources.

Make sure you are on a secure web site before you give your name, address or credit card details. Look for a padlock or a key symbol in the bottom corner of your screen.

Never send your credit card number in an e-mail because it can easily be stolen.

Frequently check your credit card statements for suspicious entries. If you spot anything strange, contact your credit card company immediately to question the charge.

Call the company before placing an order. See if a real person answers the phone and how difficult it is to get someone live. Ask for their return policy for damaged or inadequate goods, expected delivery dates, shipping and handling fees, and after-purchase support.

Think before you buy. If the online advertisement or junk e-mail offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

If you have any reason to be suspicious, you are better to err on the side of NOT buying.

Watch for hidden extras added on at checkout such as postage and packing costs, and handling fees.

VAT and customs charges for goods from overseas can add greatly to the final cost, so double check your order before you hit the final submit button.

Read the company's privacy policy carefully. Make sure you uncheck any boxes giving the vendor permission to sell or share your information with other vendors, especially your email address.

Time To Wake Up? Here's How To Get Off To An Early Start

For many of us, the "early to rise" part of Benjamin Franklin's famous advice is the hardest. But if you want to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, you can't lie under the covers all day.

To get an early start on a productive day, try these strategies:

• Give yourself a good reason to get up. Choose something important to do first thing in the morning—something you enjoy and feel passionate about. Think about this as you go to sleep, and you'll be more eager to get up the next morning.

• Practice good sleep habits. Avoid caffeine or alcohol, both of which can disturb your sleep patterns. Getting enough sleep is key to waking up on time.

• Don't just hit snooze. Set multiple alarm clocks, and place them across the room so you have to get up and get moving in order to shut them off.

• Have a buddy system. Schedule an early-morning activity with a friend (like a walk), or just a phone call to ensure you get up on time.

• Develop a consistent habit. Get up at the same time every day, regardless of what you're doing. Your body will adjust to a fixed routine.

• Drink some water. A glass of cold water first thing in the morning will revive and refresh you.

• Keep track of your success. Motivate yourself with a diary of what time you get up every morning. After a while, your desire to sleep will be outweighed by the knowledge that you'll have to log a later waking time.

Windows 8, A Diamond in the Rough? From Page 2

Applications opened from this screen also do not need to be closed according to Microsoft (Again very similar to many mobile operating systems today).

The only problem with not actually closing the applications is for those people that never turn their computer off, everything you ever open will stay open and if you don't force close the programs they will continue to run and use system resources which over time will make your computer run slow.

Even though Microsoft has removed the start menu they have kept the desktop..somewhat. The desktop is still able to be accessed via the Metro application menu but again is not meant to be used unless you need access to files and folders.

One other new feature Microsoft has added to Windows 8 is the ability to have "Picture Passwords".

A Picture Password allows you to select a picture you want to use as your password, and then draw three gestures on the picture to allow access to the computer or tablet.

This new feature is meant to increase security as it will make it more difficult for hackers to gain access to a user's computer (At least via a keylogger).

One of the big reasons to steer clear of Windows 8, at least at this point, is numerous bugs within the OS and the apps it uses. Bugs range from minor issues such as lack of support for common email protocols such as IMAP and POP, to more major issues related to hardware not functioning inside Windows 8 due to conflicts.

At this point with Windows 8 still being in Beta it is perfectly normal to have the issues they are having with the operating system but, if

the issues continue into the retail release of the software they will have another Windows Vista on their hands.

If Microsoft turns this operating system into a winner, it could mean big things for Microsoft.

One major point is if Windows 8 becomes popular, Windows will make a break into the tablet market which is predominately Android and iOS based. This would also give Windows an edge on other mobile operating systems as they would be able to operate across multiple platforms without any lapse in functionality.

So, is Windows 8 worth waiting for? At this point it makes more sense to go with Windows 7. If you are the kind of person that is into change…a lot of change…then hold off for Windows 8, but at this point Windows 8 is looking rough.

Making Use Of Google To Help Your Day Run Smoother

The Internet is a very big place. Anyone who wishes to use the Internet in an effective manner needs to be familiar with search engines.

Google has become the primary choice for millions of users, although there are some others.

One of the main reasons for Google's popularity and general reputation as being the best of the search engines is that they keep on coming up with new methods for surfing the Internet.

For instance, if you wish to look up a news story or current event, then http://news.google.com allows you to instantly have access to news

stories that are literally just a couple of minutes old.

Anyone who is looking for a picture of just about anything is almost sure to find it at http://images.google.com, which is quite possibly the largest image search engine in the whole world.

If you're looking for map or address information, check out http://maps.google.com - hundreds of thousands of addresses now have street view, showing you the actual view from a car in front of the building you're

looking for.

Google also has specific search engines for books, videos and even stock market developments.

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