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Who Needs Mobile Backup?

By [Drew Robb](#)

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By longstanding IT practice, enterprise backups encompass data stored on servers, not workstations. If you want your files backed up, the mantra goes, don't store them on your desktop. And as for laptops? Forget it. It's up to the user to back up anything vital.

Unfortunately, this mindset runs into the teeth of the explosive growth of mobile computing. By the end of this year, the road warrior population will have

swelled to as many as 60 million, according to International Data Corp (IDC). To compound the problem, about 7 million of those laptops will be badly damaged, lost, or stolen *each* year.

This results in the many sad tales we hear so frequently: the demonstration that didn't happen, the late financial report, the code that had to be re-done, the sale lost due to not following up, and of course, the countless hours spent reconstructing spreadsheets, databases, etc.

With so much corporate data residing on laptops, the question of backup is bound to crop up. IT's customary standard rejoinder, "Send files to a central server or back them up yourself," no longer suffices. This approach isn't even that functional for desktops within the enterprise. One user, for instance, tells the tale of a sales team of 20 that were allocated a total of 100 MB on a server "for backup purposes." When you tally up the amount of word docs, PowerPoint presentations, spreadsheets, graphics, and even audio and video files a sales team often has to handle, 5 MB is a drop in the ocean.

"I've been in this industry for 15 years, and I've observed storage consumption growing every year," says John Guilz, IT Manager of Network Services at Stamford, CT-based Esselte Corp. "Most people are just not diligent enough to remember to backup onto a central server, so IT should never leave it up to user."

Mobile Backup Brigade

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The fact is there are many barriers that typically prevent IT organizations from backing up and managing mobile devices. The complexity and high costs traditionally associated with remote backup have prevented many companies from properly protecting data resident on laptops. Yet surveys reveal that most individuals keep as much as 90 percent of their data on desktops or laptops and only 10 percent on central servers.

Unfortunately, IT has been educated to satisfy traditional Service Level Agreement expectancies. These encompass servers but not desktop or mobile assets. It's much easier to protect a dozen servers, for example, than 1000 laptops. This reality, though, is being eroded as more and more users take their data with them on the road and experience a wide range of catastrophes. All it takes is the CEO's machine experiencing a hard drive failure prior to a presentation, or one poor HR staffer losing the entire corporate HR database that she kept on her own laptop (true story), for mobile backup to become a greater priority.

Despite some IT resistance, then, the growing legions of mobile users are gradually starting to force the issue of laptop backup onto the network admin's radar screen. Particularly in companies that perform external audits, analyses, or evaluations of client sites, the value of laptop data rapidly becomes apparent. Firms that conduct offsite visits for expensive services like accounting are in the vanguard of the mobile backup brigade.

"Organizations must ensure the protection of mobile and remote workforce data as part of their basic IT infrastructures," says Ron Kane, senior storage consultant, Trilliant Group, a storage-focused consulting services company.

But the total number of companies effectively backing up laptops remains low. "Close to 100% of companies, in our experience, don't back up remote data," reports David Liff, a storage strategist at [Computer Associates \(CA\)](#). "The trick is to make mobile backup technology so simple to implement and maintain that it adds no strain to the existing IT workload."

Interestingly, CA initially failed to make much progress in selling its remote backup tool, BrightStor Mobile Backup. Sales people didn't achieve much success in interesting IT in the software, as most felt it could be a significant burden on top of an already strained department. Therefore, CA changed strategy and targeted department heads and CIOs, with the hope that word of mouth would spread to other departments.

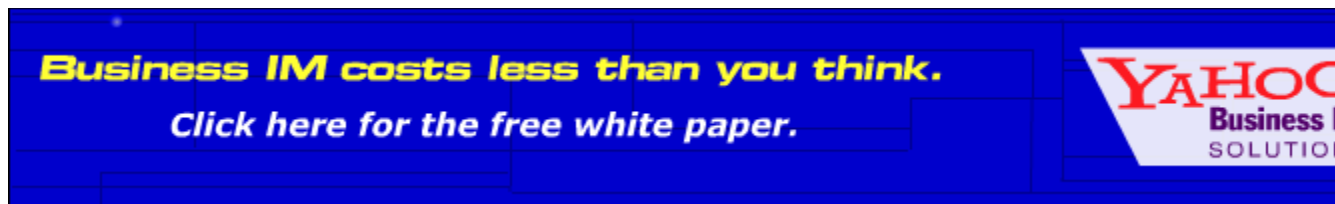
"Once you have three departments using mobile backup, IT tends to decide to support it," says Liff. "They then see that it is really not such a huge overhead so they become happy to implement it."

Gradual Acceptance

The good news is that mobile backup is slowing but surely gaining ground in the enterprise. With the technology now evolving to a point of significant automation, IT can add it into the mix without adding to their daily toil. And add it they must. Those who are proactive in adopting the technology in the immediate future will have a much easier time of it in the long run than those who wait until it is mandated by senior management, as it surely will be within the next couple of years.

This feature originally appeared on [Enterprise IT Planet](#).

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