

Digital Workflow

Backing up is imperative, and not that hard

Backup is a 'no brainer'

Paper files can't be backed up easily, but digital files can. So why on earth doesn't everyone backup their files? Many people just don't think about it while others consider it but think of it as too challenging. Backing up is not that hard, and if you avoid it and wind up losing your data you'll curse yourself. The first thing you need to have in place if you are using computers in your law practice is a proper backup system. Not doing this is probably malpractice.

Backup basics

The basics are fairly, well, *basic*. The usual drill is you set up a system that automatically (usually once a day) makes a backup of some portion of your network drives or your local drives. The backup is stored on a backup tape (although nowadays tape backups are perhaps not as prevalent). Ideally, that tape is then sent to another physical location because it would do no good to have the backup tape in the same building as the original data. Why not? Well, if a terrible fire consumed the entire building it would destroy both the data and the backup of that data.

Offsite backup is mandatory

Large enterprise companies used to have systems to courier backup tapes to other locations, and then to retrieve them if necessary. Small companies don't have this kind of ability, so what can they do? Fortunately, in recent years the cost of storing information on the Internet has lowered to the point that it's economically feasible for even small firms to store backup information 'in the cloud' (as the Internet is often referred to).

What backup system do I need?

There are so many companies that do this kind of thing that it would be pointless to name them here. In any case, you'll probably need to hire a consultant to help you determine the best backup system for your law office. If you're a solo or very small firm you might be able to get by using some of the very basic services without engaging a consultant.

Down & Dirty solution

One quick solution (imperfect, but better than nothing) is to simply copy all of your key information to an external hard drive that you keep with you at all times. Small external drives that store 500 GBs of data can now be had for under \$200. And if you use Microsoft Windows you can use a free Microsoft program called SyncToy to automatically synchronize your data to the external hard drive (Mac users should use \$29 program called 'SuperDuper').

Recommendations

Offsite backup can be accomplished by using synchronizing services such as Carbonite (www.carbonite.com - \$55/year for unlimited backup); DropBox (www.getdropbox.com \$99/year for 50 GBs of storage) SugarSync (www.sugarsync.com \$99/year for 60 GBs of storage). For onsite backup, which is also important, consider Drobo (www.drobo.com). All of these solutions work with Mac or PCs.