

An Unfortunate Incident

I received a phone call at 8 AM on June 28th from the controller at one of our clients. She was standing outside their facility while firefighters were attempting to put out a fire that started in the middle of the night. I left immediately for their site – 1.5 hours away. As we do their Microsoft Network maintenance, I called our network staff while driving. By the time I reached the site, Shawn had arranged for their email to be spooled to backup by their Internet Service Provider. Knowing their hardware and software needs allowed Shawn to start gathering server replacement data immediately.

When I arrived the firefighters were still extinguishing hot spots. The electrical fire, which started in the middle of the night, had burned a major part of the manufacturing area and offices. **A fire door between the offices and the manufacturing area was obstructed preventing the fire door from closing completely.** However, another fire door held and the rest of the manufacturing, storage, and shipping/receiving areas were protected.

The fire-safe file cabinet in the Controller's office survived. However, cracks had developed and everything inside was wet. This included the computer backup tapes that were stored on-site. Unfortunately, the tapes were damaged by water and heat. Although the file cabinet was rated as being safe for paper it was not safe for computer media. **For the fire-safe file to be considered media safe, an additional fire-safe box must be inserted into the fire-safe file cabinet drawer.** In addition, the backup tapes were stored in the top drawer instead of the bottom drawer. If my memory serves me correctly, a fire is about 25 degrees hotter at four feet off the ground.

We sat in the receiving office and listed, by person, their computer needs – both hardware and software. We also discussed other information technology needs. Their time clock system was no longer manufactured and the data collection software was out-of-date. In addition, their bar code readers used to take inventory were destroyed.

Prior to leaving to drive back to Solon, I visited the site that the Owner had arranged for the office staff to move into – about three miles away. That meant we needed to add a terminal server to the hardware mix as well as a second hardware firewall and DSL line. Since the phone company said it would take weeks to move the IP addresses to another circuit, the decision was made to locate the servers in the receiving office. This necessitated having new data lines drawn and improving the electricity feed into the remainder of the building.

When I got back to the office around 3:30 PM we started to go through the backup tapes, software diskettes and CDs, and the paper licenses recovered from the file cabinet in the Controller's office. The diskettes and CDs were a total loss. The tapes were in poor condition. The paper licenses were placed between paper towels to dry. Because the paper licenses survived, we were able to order replacement media from the software manufacturers. **Lesson – copies of all program media, licenses and backup tapes should be stored off site.**

By Wednesday night, Shawn had quotes from Dell and a local computer builder. The insurance company gave the go ahead Thursday morning and the Owner decided to go with Dell. The orders were placed late Thursday afternoon with Dell, Tech Data, and CDW. Next day delivery was specified.

Most of the peripheral hardware (uninterruptible power supplies, modems, routers, firewalls, printers, cables, etc.) and software came in the following Monday with some sliding to Wednesday because of the July 4 holiday. The Dell servers shipped late Monday and arrived on Thursday. The workstations shipped on June 30 but Dell sent them common carrier instead of overnight. We picked them up at the freight terminal on Friday, July 7.

Shawn started loading the server software on July 6th working backwards, he attempted to recover data from the backup tapes. Some backup tapes failed in five minutes. However, most failed about 1.5 hours into the restore. He was able to retrieve each person's document's folder and common folders (containing Word and Excel files) from the June 26th tape.

The Company's practice was to remove the month-end backup tape from the three week rotation. Shawn was able to recover email and the Macola database as of August, 2005. Fortunately, another practice was to run all posting journals and month-end reports to a monthly reports folder. After spooled to disk, they would then print the reports. These folders were in the common files area that was recovered as of June 26. Therefore, the Controller was able to make summary entries from August, 2005 through May, 2006. Unfortunately, the June, 2006 folder was not retrievable and the information had to be rebuilt based on records in the shipping/receiving office and bank records.

According to Exact Software, another Company in Chicago had a fire the same week. They stored their backup tapes off site but never tested them to make sure they were properly backing up. The tapes were blank. The Company went out of business.

The hardware and software was delivered on Monday, July 10th – less than two weeks from the fire. The office was back in operation on Tuesday, July 11th.