

Take a look at your back up!

By Jim Lee

Your computer back-up arrangements may be in place. Typically, information is copied to tape or some other “offline” medium and taken away from the office every night. A procedure that seems straightforward enough. But have you ever tried to restore that backup? More importantly, have you ever tried to restore it to another computer – not the one it came from?

This is when push comes to shove as the problem stems from the fact that security has become such an influence on all of the operating systems and computer manufacturers. In order to check that things are as they should be, everything that a computer stores has become an object. Objects have owners and objects have permissions. When it comes to restoring data even to identical hardware, there can be major issues. The problems are not confined to Microsoft, IBM or Sun. They also arise with Unix, Linux, Windows, Solaris and all of the current operating systems.

The situation is increasingly universal, but subtly different for every instance. At my own company we have become involved in three basically different scenarios. The first is trying to bring up old data on new hardware. The second is trying to keep a reasonably current copy of data available on a computer elsewhere, such as at our Datacentre. The third is providing immediately available replicas that can switch-in when the original fails. These three possibilities have very little difference when it comes down to being able to restore and access current data. The difference lies in the access provision, in the network infrastructure surrounding the computer. Getting current data onto a computer that is accessible by your people is, fundamentally, fraught with the same problems in almost every case. Because of this, we know what to look for, we know what to expect, and we know how to fix the problems.

Backup is nothing like it used to be and ‘Restore’ is the acid test. Restoring to another computer almost always fails the first time, but what is learned is invaluable. I urge all commercial computer users to test this. Assumed success in this basic function has seen Business Continuity Plans fail at the first hurdle, so to speak.