



RETHINKING DO-IT-YOURSELF TAPE & MEDIA STORAGE

BY STEVE MACKES

The concept of do-it-yourself is attractive because it promises cost savings over paying a separate party for the same service. But when it comes to an organization's off-site tape and media storage, doing it yourself is rarely a smart, money-saving proposition. There are a number of reasons why.

First, when the costs of utilized personnel, space, transportation and other resources are considered, there is not much price difference between assuming, internally, the burden and responsibility of off-site storage and contracting it out to a reputable third party. Second, initial savings, in most cases, quickly disappear, brought on by the diversion of personnel and other resources from the organization's core business, resulting in a loss of productivity. Consequently, tape and media storage do-it-yourselfers may actually pay more than the cost of hiring information management specialists to handle the same tasks.

There are also hidden, hard-to-measure costs and additional risks when an organization does its own media and tape storage. For example, it's questionable that a company, performing its own media and tape storage and conducting business outside the realm of information management has the expertise to enact the best storage solutions. And that's not just in terms of price, but regarding the primary reasons for tape and media storage in the first place; issues like retention, security, ease of access and disaster recovery.

A company specializing in information management, on the other hand, has built-in efficiencies and a wealth of both knowledge-based experience and best practices. It also brings a focused awareness of innovative developments in the field that might significantly inform decisions. Those beneficial factors alone can make it far more cost-effective, overall, to leave tape and media storage in the hands of those who do it best.

AFTER A DISASTER, YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR BACKUP

Consider this finding from a study conducted by Coopers and Lybrand: Companies with no recovery plan in place have only a 10% probability of surviving a disaster.

Dramatically improving those odds is dependent upon storage, which is the basis of any backup system and the key to an organization's recovery in the aftermath of a disaster. What makes a disaster

truly terrible is not being able to recover. That's why it's more imperative than ever to have a viable contingency plan that includes storing critical data off-site.

This is an area where the do-it-yourself mentality of cutting corners to save a few cents makes no sense at all. Disasters—fires, hurricanes, floods, furnace and steam pipe explosions—by their very nature, often come when least expected. So, if Disaster Recovery is about expecting the unexpected, compromising preparedness to save a little in cost would appear to be the height of penny wise/pound foolishness.

Merely storing the information is not enough. It needs to be organized and indexed, securely protected at an alternate site, easily accessible and able to be tested. These elements are vital, should a disaster occur, to ensure a quick, efficient recovery of systems and data. After all, the longer it takes to recover from a disaster, the more costly it becomes not just in dollars spent, but also in productivity and opportunity lost.

MORE REASONS WHY DO-IT-YOURSELF STORAGE IS RISKY

Organizations handling tape and media storage themselves are performing an operation that is usually outside their comfort zone and areas of expertise. This increases the likelihood of important considerations, safeguards and procedures being neglected, misunderstood or seriously compromised.

For instance, the alternative storage site may not be carefully selected. It might be too close to the main data center to avoid being affected by the same disaster. It might not be readily accessible when needed, or offer strong protection against fire, smoke, temperature and humidity damage.

There could also be problems with tasking internal employees to run the storage process. If the personnel are inexperienced with tape and media storage, they might mishandle materials and cause serious damage. Also, if personnel are not attached to the storage program full time, they could soon lose their commitment or be unavailable when most needed. In the event of a disaster or other emergency situation, this would impair quick responsiveness and increase associated costs due to delay.

Additionally, lack of experience and/or commitment could cause the maintenance of a viable audit trail to suffer. The missing or inadequate documentation of events, timelines, participants and chain of command would hinder all areas of legal compliance and problem resolution.

Another potential do-it-yourself risk is the possibility of an unstable employee gaining access to an organization's most sensitive data. All too often, local disasters can be traced back to some form of employee sabotage. But by then, the damage has been done. Other than using an external third party to handle tape and media storage, this risk is extremely difficult to predict and control.

All in all, the do-it-yourself approach can cause a complacency that overlooks significant security

issues. Even the transport of important tapes and media in less than secure vehicles could be a problem. This is a very real concern as the risk of having a vehicle accident is greater than the risk of disaster striking a data center.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN TAPE AND MEDIA STORAGE

Once it becomes clear that a third party specialist, not the organization itself, should handle the storage process, there are a number of characteristics to look for in choosing a provider that delivers. Price is certainly a major consideration, but just as important, perhaps even more so, are issues such as:

- Customer Service Responsiveness
- Storage Expertise
- State-of-the-art Facilities
- Reliable Real Time Tracking
- Round the Clock Accessibility & Monitoring
- Hot Site Delivery (for testing purposes)
- Best Practices Overall Resources

Customer service means being available 24/7 to answer questions, execute schedules, lend IT support, and, in emergencies, provide fast pick ups and deliveries, including Disaster Recovery Service runs. It means drivers equipped with laser scanners and portable printers, ready to give customers what they need, when they need it.

Storage vaults providing the best tape and media protection are not just secure, but also climate and environmentally controlled. Equipped with advanced fire, smoke and heat detection systems, they maintain constant temperatures between 65 and 68 degrees and relative humidity levels of 35 to 45 percent.

To protect against fire, look for an off-site facility that features either an FM200 fire suppression system with a 4-hour fire rating (best for sensitive tapes and media) or a pre-action water sprinkler system (suitable for most film and sound materials).

FM200 is a gas agent that, when activated, removes all oxygen from a room, causing a fire to be contained and smothered. Pre-action water sprinkler systems feature pipes that are water-free until heat causes the wax on a sprinkler head to melt, whereupon a condenser rushes water to the immediate area affected. These systems provide the highest standards of fire resistance protection while eliminating or significantly reducing the potential for water damage.

For secure electronic backup, it's vital that the access system be web-based and password-protected, with the data compressed, encrypted and stored off-site in SAS70 Type II hosting centers. (SAS70 Type

It is a widely recognized auditing standard that includes the testing of operational effectiveness.)

To facilitate accessibility, monitoring and accountability, advanced barcode tracking technology should be in place that allows descriptive information to be quickly matched with a case label and location. Containers should also have verifiable control seals to prove that the contents are intact and there has been no tampering.

CONCLUSION

With the many variables of effective tape and media storage, it often comes down to do-it-yourself or do it right. If the protection and accessibility of sensitive information is a priority, as well it should be, the choice is clear.

Organizations practicing do-it-yourself tape and storage don't always know what they should be doing, or the consequences of what they are doing. And, as the saying goes, ignorance is bliss until something bad happens. That's why, given the potentially costly areas associated with tape and media storage such as disaster recovery, legal liability and compliance to regulations, it makes sense to work with a knowledgeable partner that has your back when it comes to backup.

In selecting that partner, consider all the factors, including price, but not just price alone. Consider convenience, responsive customer service, security, climate-controlled locations, round the clock accessibility, industry expertise, advanced, innovative technology and overall resources—these qualities all have value associated with them that can ultimately impact an organization's operations and bottom line. Compare. Do the math, and factor in the intangibles like relief from stress, worry and uncertainty, which come when an organization is in good hands, providing benefit beyond measure.

A study shows that the average amount of money a data center spends on do-it-yourself off-site storage is less than 3/10ths of a percent of its budget. For perhaps 1/10th of a percent additional, isn't it worth the added productivity, better use of personnel, greater information protection and overall peace of mind gained from choosing a reliable tape and media storage provider like GRM?

MORE ABOUT GRM

GRM Document Management is a leading provider of lifecycle records and information management solutions. The company brings proprietary innovation, blended integration and new levels of cost efficiency to document storage, data protection, digital/electronic document management and certified destruction. With over 25 years of experience, GRM has earned the trust and continued business of more than 5,000 customers—large and small, domestic and multinational—representing a wide range of industries. Clients are served from state-of-the-art, climate-controlled facilities in major U.S. markets and internationally throughout China.