

PREPARING FOR THE WORST (TO PREVENT A DISASTER)

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In this article, we'll give you some ideas that will help you put such a plan into place.

We'll specifically look at things you can do prior to a catastrophic event to help prevent disasters. Then, we'll look at things you can do in advance to help you recover from disaster in the least amount of time possible.

Power:

One of the easiest ways to protect your computer from dying a quick and painful death is stabilizing the power supply. You can actually prevent the effects of a power outage with proper planning. A simple surge protector with a minimum 900 Joules rating will run you less than \$25 and can save you from an expensive motherboard replacement. You should also make sure that your power outlets are providing clean electricity and that they're properly grounded. Take a visit to your local Radio Shack and pick up a small outlet tester (which will run you as little as \$14).

The absolute best hardware protection an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). UPSs come in a variety of sizes and flavors and choosing the right one may not be easy. This will prevent any data loss that might result from an improper shutdown. It maintains continuous operation through blackouts, voltage fluctuations and surges with zero transfer time

DRIVE REDUNDANCY

Another thing you can do to prevent disasters is set up redundancy on your storage devices. You accomplish this using technology known as Redundant Array of inexpensive disks (RAID). The price drop in storage, along with improved technologies makes the RAID a relatively inexpensive guard against the inevitable drive failures you'll encounter.

There are several ways to set up a RAID, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Since we're only focusing on disaster recovery in this article, we'll only concentrate on the two more popular options. One thing to note is that you can set up a RAID through hardware or software. We highly recommend only using the hardware solution. This will give you much better performance, and it's generally considered more reliable.

The only option open to the Mac environment that aids in backup is known as RAID level 1 and is referred to as mirroring. A RAID 1 configuration uses two identical hard drives and mirrors all data between them. That way, if one fails, the server will continue to operate. The main disadvantage to this is that you're essentially losing half of your storage potential.

If you have two 9 GB drives and set them up in a RAID 1 configuration, your computer recognizes them as a single 9 GB drive. This is necessary to allow for one drive to completely

mirror all of the data on the other drive. If an error occurs on one of the disks, you simply open the Disk Utility application and click the RAID tab's Rebuild button. The corrupted disk is then rebuilt from the data on the other disk.

Backup, backup, backup

Backup is a concept that isn't always easy to grapple with. It's something that you do that doesn't appear to have immediate tangible benefits. In fact, you might begin to wonder if all the effort is worth it. It can be summed up in one word: Yes! Do not, under any circumstances, try to convince yourself or allow anyone else to convince you that backups aren't necessary.

The type of backup software you use, and the type of medium you back up to, will vary greatly depending on your environment. We will, however, try to give you some pointers on a few things that can make your backups easier, more reliable, and overall, more pleasant.

Backup pointers:

First, we recommend making sure you properly research the backup software and backup medium before making a purchase. Next, you need to create a backup schedule. Map out exactly what you're planning on backing up and how often you'll be doing it. Determine which type of backups you'll be doing, whether they'll be full, incremental, differential, or a combination. Also, make sure you write it all out on paper and that you understand what the pros and cons of your decision are.

You also need to consider what type of data you'll be backing up. If you're just backing up groups of text documents and spreadsheets, then you won't have much to worry about. But if you have other, more in-depth applications, make sure the backup utilities will interact.

A critical aspect of backing up your data is that it helps you perform periodic restore tests. There's nothing more frustrating than attempting to restore a server and finding out that your backups haven't been working properly.