

Tape Backup Procedures

There is nothing more catastrophic for a business than a bad tape backup. If your system crashes, you lose everything and there is no way to get it back. Fortunately, this is one catastrophe that is easy to avoid by following some simple guidelines. The following are minimum requirements for managing your tape backups.

Tape Rotation:

Use **at least** a five-tape rotation, one tape for each day of the week. Remove an end of month tape from the rotation each month and save it for six months to a year. Remove a year-end tape each year and save it for at least a few years. Make one person responsible for changing the tape and checking the logs each day. Make sure someone else knows how to do it in that person's absence.

Off Site Storage:

Keep at least one good tape backup off site at all times. Make sure the off site backup stays current.

Check Backup Logs:

Check the tape backup logs each day to verify that the backup ran successfully the previous night. Each entry in the log may look very similar to the previous one. Make sure you verify that you are looking at the backup for the previous night. It is not uncommon for people to look at the log each day and not notice that the date has not changed for weeks. Also check to make sure the summary information about the backup stays fairly constant. If one night the tape backs up 4GB of files and the next night it only backs up 2GB, something is wrong.

Look for Skipped Files:

Check the detail in the tape backup logs each day for “skipped” files. Skipped files are files that were in use when the tape tried to back them up. Most tape backups do not back up files that are in use. Most tape backups will report that the backup was “Successful” even if there were skipped files. The detail in the log should identify what files, if any, were skipped. If you consistently have skipped files, you need to address why they are being skipped. Most skipped files are due to a user leaving their computer on over night.

Test Restores:

Periodically restore a file from the tape backup to verify that it is actually working. This should be done at least once a month. An easy way to do this is to find a little used file on the server and rename it. Then restore the file from the tape. This can usually be done while the users are logged in and using the system. Just make sure nobody tries to access that file while you are doing the restore.

If you follow these simple steps, you will greatly reduce the risk of being surprised by a bad tape backup when you need it most.