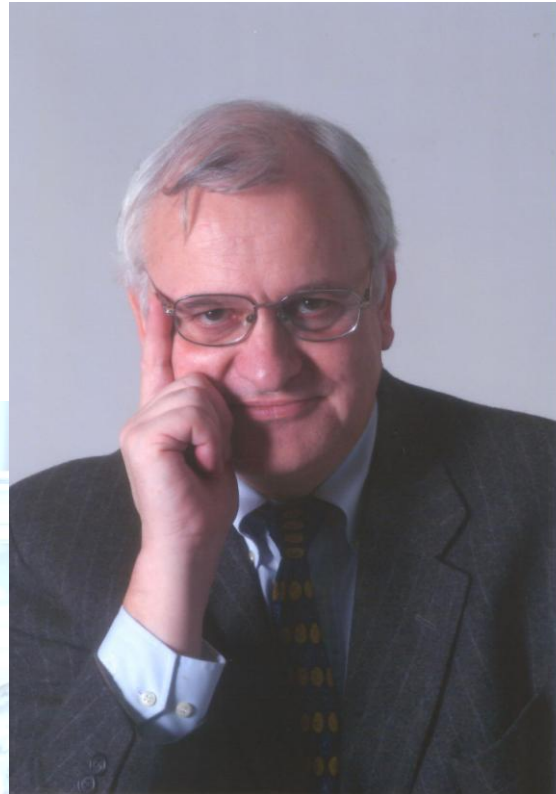


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ITMatters

In this regular column Charles Zealey of ITSolve covers all aspects of business and personal computing. If you have a question about IT matters, email it to Charles at itmatters@itsolve.co.uk



Disaster, what disaster?

We looked last time at the subject of disaster recovery. There are many disasters that can strike a business, from the natural to the man-made; caused by technological or human failure. At ITSolve we have to deal all too frequently with situations where a computer disk has failed.

So what went wrong?

A typical hard drive comes in a package about 100mm x 140mm x 15mm. It contains a set of rotating disks, read/write heads, two electric motors and some complex electronics. The disk spins at speeds in excess of 5000rpm. The read/write heads are arranged to traverse the disks separated only by a thin layer of air a few tens of nanometers thick. I tell you this not to baffle you with technology but to demonstrate that there is a lot to go wrong. The fact that most disks work for years, switched on continuously, and often in far from ideal conditions, is a testament to the manufacturing processes used. For me the surprise is not that the occasional disk fails. It is that more do not.

Does it matter?

Consider too how much we rely on our computer disks. Typically a PC disk will store both the computer operating system and our own data – our documents, emails, contact lists, databases and so on. The failure of a disk means that our computer stops working and we do not have access to the information we need to work even if we can locate a spare computer.

What to do?

So what can we do to reduce the risk that we suffer in this way? First and foremost you should become religious about backing up your data. Never, ever, ever get to the situation where you only have one copy of important information. Backup up as frequently as you can manage. Could you manage to repeat your last week of work on the computer without undue pain? Then perhaps you could backup weekly. For most of us that is not enough. And test your backups to make sure that they are readable and complete. More on backing up next month.

Look in the mirror

Another key step you can take is to use a server or storage device with RAID or mirroring capability. This enables information to be stored simultaneously on two disks meaning that in the event of a failure of one of them the information is still accessible. There are of course lots of options – talk to your IT supplier about them.

Disasters do happen. Like good boy scouts, 'be prepared'.

Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/. For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email lisa@itsolve.co.uk.

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