

PeerSync™

Critical Limitations With Tape Backup And How You Can Overcome Them

The way to overcome the critical limitations with tape backup is to go to a disk-based backup. The point is that users "pay for" recovery time, and disk is inherently always going to be the leader when it comes to recovery time. If you have to go to a tape, you've lost the battle because you can't beat the clock. A few seconds to restore from disk, hours or days to restore from tape.

If a CEO comes to the IT director and says, "Hey, I've just deleted a file. Can you go get it back for me?" Traditionally, when you are using tape it is acceptable to take two days to get that piece back. But, if you are working on a proposal and that proposal is very timely, your ability to recover it is very urgent, and you cannot afford to wait three days.

So, instead of using tape as the primary backup, by introducing hard drives, the recovery time becomes instantaneous. The upside is that you can recover that proposal or the CEO's lost document within moments. The downside is, of course, is that you are going to raise the expectations of your clients, and that's a good thing and a bad thing.

So, in some respects, IT people may not want that. But the CEO and the staff in the front office will understand the value of that right away. The problem is that two out of three times when you go to recover from tape, you are unable to recover. One of the tapes in the set has been damaged, or the last backup occurred prior to your most current save.

Then it's not just how timely, but did the file actually get stored correctly. You may not know that for several days. Some software products actually read back the tape to make sure the tape is written. But that's a false sense of security. That reading process can be destructive to the tape because you are doing another head pass over it.

Also, if you are physically rotating the tapes, and they happen to encounter a magnetic field it may not scramble the whole tape, it may scramble just enough bites to screw it all up though. And all it really takes is one bad block to make the whole tape unusable. So, there are many issues with removable media. A removable hard drive of course can offer the same problems, but more likely those are going to be fixed items.

So when you use a standard file storage mechanism, not only is the cost low, but chances are you already have sufficient storage in your existing network that by simply enhancing the software, you can take advantage of those pieces. It is amazing that 30 to 40% of all people that buy a tape drive on a server are not using them on a regular basis six months later.

The first time that it proves unreliable, or the first time you stop using it because you just forgot or the schedule did not go off, the machine had to be rebooted, the subconscious says, "Hey, I missed it last week, it's not going to be any good anyway, so let's not even bother with it."

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