

RECOVERING FROM DISASTER



There is never a good time for a serious computer problem but there is always a terrible, terrible, time for it to happen.

A few weeks ago on the very night this edition of the magazine was going to start production the dreaded 'blue screen' appeared on my main PC.

Having been told on my first introduction to computers that the most important thing I must do is to 'back up data', I was reasonably okay with backups to hand.

My Outlook, which contains all my contacts (and there are thousands) as well as all my email history is backed up to the internet daily. The LPHCA payroll is backed up across the network weekly and other databases, financial data, documents procedures, etc., are backed up reasonably well 'ish'.

However, nobody can back up completely and much of my day's work was now in 'Hyper space'.

If you have every had a PC failure your mind immediately races to what you have on the PC and what you haven't backed up recently. You certainly don't stop to think in a reasonable manner about the implications of your problem. Blind panic sets in as you suddenly realise that those 'family photos' or a 'vital database', or something equally important might have not been backed up. You then start to think about the week or so it could take to re-load all the programs that you have taken for granted for years, the personalisation of your email folders, the Internet Browser Favourites and even the family tree or whatever else you have on the PC.

You haven't yet even considered all the upgrades that have downloaded by the web and where the hell all your software

discs are. My payroll for example, always send disks until when, yes you've guessed it the last upgrade via the web.

You realise you will be hearing the message on a premium rate call 'you're in the queue and we're determined that you won't get through' message or one of its variants 'our agents are all busy goodbye' or 'you are currently number 50,000 in our queue either wait till Christmas or try again later'. Sound familiar?

My fist cry for help always goes to Liam McCann of Zenergy Computing who has often helped the LPHCA and many of our Members in our hours of need. Liam, as always returns the call at whatever time of day or night it is and on that dreaded Monday night help was to hand.

We tried all the usual Windows tricks but put the white flag up when the dreaded 'you need to format this disc to proceed' message started to arrive too often. So then it was taking the hard drive out and trying it in an identical PC, to be confronted by another blue screen of death.

'Sounds like the disk is gone', says Liam as my blood pressure starts rising knowing that he's rarely wrong. So mid-evening I start to see if there is a Disk Recovery Company out there. After an hour and a half of trawling the web on another PC and speaking to people who want the national debt to help you, my luck changed for the better.

I found a Local 'ish' company who answered the phone at around 22.30. At this point they gave me hope if nothing else and they were reasonable in their estimate of costs.

Having a busy next day planned the disc was duly taken by Alan in the office to a hi-tec business park just North of Aylesbury for examination.

The company is Altirium and they said '24 hours to give a verdict', from which - 'on time' some cautious good news duly arrived by email. The data is there, there are a small amount of corruptions in the boot sector of the disc but we should be able to get most things back.

I had also sent another crashed disk to them that I felt had a very little chance of recovery. The other disc was a secondary consideration as by now I was using a second PC and remembering things like the fax data is on the main disc and I don't back up the fax date. Doh!

My biggest nightmare was disappearing - a total loss of data and I now started to dream about perfect scenarios. 'Repairing the disc so I wouldn't have to re-install many programs, with their various service packs, upgrades and downloads.'

So I plucked up the courage to ask Mark if the disc could be repaired to boot up again more or less as if nothing had happened. I got a 'no' followed by a 'but!' 'No' its knackered 'but' we could probably get it all onto another drive!

Further emails and dialogue followed and on the Saturday morning I headed towards Aylesbury to resume my life again.

Things got even better when Mark explained that he was finishing work soon but he could bring the new discs and data to a wonderful English Country Pub where he relaxed pulling pints.

I met Mark and a few other lovely people, had a small drink then headed home where I plugged it into the PC and it was just like it hadn't happened. 90% of the data on the other disc had also been recovered.

As a token of gratitude to Mark and Liam I have put details of their services in this mag, please use them. You wouldn't be reading this now if I hadn't.

Steve



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