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# HOW TO TEST DATA BACKUPS: A BRIEF GUIDE

If you have recently implemented data backup solutions, in addition to a disaster recovery plan, congratulations! You have taken a proactive approach — one that could save your business.

Since data is the lifeline of your business, it is no longer enough to simply *create* a data backup plan. To ensure the right levels of protection, you must regularly test data backups, ensuring that everything is running as it should.

Not sure how? Well, this data backup testing guide is for you.

## YOUR BUSINESS HAS CREATED A DATA BACKUP PLAN — NOW WHAT?

If you have not yet read [The Complete Guide to Data Backups for SMBs](#), it's the perfect place to start. The more familiar you become with your data backup strategy, the better.

That way, as the needs of your business evolve, you will be able to effectively improve and manage your disaster recovery plan. At this point, since you already have a data backup strategy in place, it is now time to develop best practice habits.

Of those, regular testing is imperative — this applies to all proactive strategies.



According to [a survey from The Hartford](#), 59% of businesses have a formal business continuity plan (a component of your disaster recovery plan), but only **a third** of those plans are tested.

In contrast, by testing your data back up plan, you can identify weak areas that you may have otherwise missed. By catching these early warning signs, you can then implement changes that fix these issues before any data loss occurs.

Remember, when it comes to your company's data, always take a proactive approach — limiting the need for a reactive approach (because it may be too late at that point).

**Bottom line:** Although data testing requirements will vary from one business to the next, once you create a plan, you must regularly test it. That means testing the associated technologies and procedures in question, ensuring that your strategy is able to effectively backup and then restore your data in the case of an emergency.

## HOW DO I TEST MY DATA BACKUP PLAN?

The fact that you're currently taking an interest in data backup testing is the first critical step. It could help you avoid a potentially devastating blow to your business.

Regular testing also provides you with an opportunity to fully address your policies and methods, supporting greater peace of mind.

### 1 START WITH A BACKUP TESTING PLAN.

This plan should include technical specifications listing where your backups are stored, how to access them, who has access to them, and more.

By developing such a plan (and sharing that plan with your team), your organization will develop the necessary experience and skills required to perform data recovery. They'll have everything they need in one spot, ready to go.

## 2 TEST YOUR PLAN BY RUNNING SIMULATIONS.

By creating a hypothetical disaster, you can assure that all of your most critical data is recovered as expected. These types of drills are critical in the case of an emergency.

As you test your plan, be sure to time the drill itself. This will help you identify how long your operations will be down — be sure to recover all associated applications as well (not just data). To ensure that nothing is missed, create a checklist to verify all of your key systems and servers are included.

That way, you'll never forget about any critical systems.



## 3 RECORD ISSUES AND SNAGS.

During the test, record any issues you encounter — in terms of both application reboots and data restoration. The ultimate goal here is to identify problem areas so that you can improve the speed and efficiency of your backup recovery plan moving forward.

Overall, there are a number of methodologies and procedures you can explore. Some of your options include, but are not limited to:

- **A simple walk-through** — Verbally step through your plan with your team. Discuss each step, as well as possible gaps. This will precede an in-action test and is ideal for limiting disruptions.
- **A simulation** — As discussed above, a simulation or “tabletop test” will allow you to test a hypothetical situation which will not typically impact your day-to-day operations. During this test, you would focus on a specific scenario. This will involve physical testing and assigned role-playing.
- **A full interruption** — Although time-consuming and disruptive, this is the most worthwhile method when aiming to identify gaps in your plan. If you do not have a dedicated IT team, then you should consider a professionally [managed IT service team](#).

**Bottom line:** You should regularly test file-level backups (restoring a random sampling of files), in addition to a full file system restore.



## ADDITIONAL HELPFUL TIPS FOR DATA BACKUP TESTING

Whether you conduct business in the healthcare industry or in retail, there are some key things to remember regarding data recovery testing, including the following tips.

- Make testing backups a priority. Although it is not practical to test after each and every backup, testing should become part of your routine. At the very minimum, ensure the validity of your testing plan weekly and/or monthly.
- Take a more holistic approach, testing all aspects of your backup plan (this includes data, application, and system testing).
- Understand that not all data is created equal. For your most important data, additional controls and procedures should be put into place to effectively mitigate risks. For example, you may want to take extra precautions specific for compliance, audit, retention, and legal requirements.
- Don't forget about the role of automation. This will support greater validity and consistency, without disrupting regular operations. However, you also need to conduct regular manual testing as well. This is particularly the case when introducing new applications into your organization.

At the end of the day, the last thing you want to do is wait until disaster strikes to take your data backup plan seriously. Now is the time to develop proactive testing habits to ensure your company's success and longevity.

Remember, [60% of SMBs](#) that lose their data will be out of business within six months. Do not become a statistic.

Be sure to share any questions or concerns about your current data backup testing plan with your IT services partner.



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