

## Taking the panic factor out of technology

### Data falling through cracks can cost money

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Like his clients, financial adviser Brian Shumak wants to be able to sleep at night without worry, despite these uncertain times.

In his clients' case, the "sleep factor" is their level of tolerance for risk in terms of their investments.

It's something advisers such as Shumak, 42, spend a lot of time getting to understand in order to properly choose the types of financial instruments in which they advise their clients to invest.

In his case, it's about the technology. Since Shumak's role at HC Financial Group in Toronto involves meeting with clients at their homes or offices, he's usually out of the office with his notebook PC.

Until last summer, he worried about two main things: Having his clients' data stolen or hacked, or dropping his notebook and being unable to retrieve the data.

"I was concerned about information falling through the cracks because those cracks cost you money," he says, adding the time spent a calling pay-for-service support line meant he was still spending too much time struggling with his technology tools instead of working with them. "No one needs that stress."

He knows of one business that lost a contract because a computer was stolen and the client felt the potential breach of security was serious.

Shumak doesn't want to end up in the same boat.

"I wouldn't even use WiFi in a Starbucks because I was worried someone might hack into my computer," he says. "And while I backed up on USB keys and disks and a portable hard drive in my office, I always thought the worst-case scenario would be for my house and office to burn down at the same time so I'd lose everything and the backup would be useless."

So last summer, when he discovered no-panic computing (NPC), the light went on.

NPC is the brainchild of electronics importer Larry Keating, founder and CEO of Keating Technologies, a Markham, Ont., company that has been bringing cutting-edge technology to Canadians for 20 years.

The concept is simple: Instead of buying a laptop and then struggling to load software, keeping it secure, keeping protective software such as antivirus and firewalls up to date and configuring regular backups, you lease a laptop fully loaded with 24/7 support for \$130 a month.

It's a service targeted at small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) that allows them to feel like "they have their own corporate IT department," as Keating puts it.

"I'd just bought a new laptop and between that and getting it going and all the issues with my other one I'd probably spent about \$3,000," Shumak says. "But I went ahead with no-panic computer despite that. I'll give the other laptop to one of my sons."

# Business Edge

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Since then, he says, he doesn't worry as much. Even if his laptop is stolen, the data is secure and can be remotely wiped as soon as it connects to the internet. In the meantime, all his data is backed up and can be installed in a replacement immediately.

It's not an idle threat. Network security company McAfee Inc. says many SMBs live with a false sense of security that they are too small to be targets of cybercriminals.

A survey of 500 IT decision-makers from companies with 1,000-2,000 employees found a third (32 per cent) of small and medium-sized businesses in the U.S. and Canada have been attacked more than four times by cybercriminals in the last three years.

A quarter of those attacked (26 per cent) took at least a week to recover, while recovery time in Canada was even greater, with a third (36 per cent) taking a week or more to fully restore their systems.

The biggest issue is that they don't take the time to allocate resources to security, McAfee says.

NPC commissioned a study by AMI-Partners Research that found 70 per cent of Canadian small businesses believe data security is the No. 1 priority of their business, but most admit they haven't done much about it.

Theoretically, of course, anyone can do what NPC does - it would just take a lot of time and a host of different purchases.

Symantec, for example, offers its online security and data backup in the form of "software as a service (SaaS)."

SaaS is the emerging business model of the software industry, in which clients "rent" the software instead of buying it outright. It reduces costs to a fixed monthly fee and includes support and upgrades. In many cases, it takes a lot of IT pressure off the business since the software and data are often hosted at the vendor's data centre, meaning the subscribers also jettison the costs of buying and maintaining servers.

There are many IT companies that offer similar backup and storage services along with contracted help-desk services. Others offer security services, like Nortel's secure portable office (SPO), a secure desktop on a USB key that removes all traces of a user's activities when unplugged from a PC - meaning no one can hack into the machine and extract their passwords.

The issue for most SMBs is knowing what combination of hardware, software and practices is best for their business. That's why the trend to IT outsourcing is growing. Most SMBs want to focus on what they do best - servicing their customers and growing their business.

NPC has brought this into one package and made it simple, bundling hardware with software and "wetware," the human factor sitting at the call centre to answer the phone.

NPC offers a lineup of three Hewlett Packard notebooks with a fourth, a tablet, coming soon. Each is installed with the same security software, such as ESET antivirus & antispymware business edition and DataGuard from Iron Mountain, where the data is backed up.

Also included are utilities such as Speedifier, an Outlook widget that applies some artificial-intelligence thinking to incoming emails and helps users organize them better.

"We supply it configured with the users' name already on the screen and the help-desk number right there," says Keating.

"It's targeted at SMBs, but we're getting some interest from larger enterprises too, which we didn't expect."