

Medical Office Systems, LLC

September 2010 Newsletter

Single Point of Failure

If you don't want to be held hostage by technology, you will need to determine how many "single points of failure" are lurking in your systems. The "single point" or points that can cause your systems to grind to a halt may be tricky to find, but it's essential in order to have a workaround or alternative ready in case Murphy's Law strikes. Finally, a postscript on the Apple i-Phone antenna flap.

Missed or lost a newsletter? You can always get back issues in Adobe PDF format online at my website - www.MedOfficeSystems.com/newsletter_tips.htm. If you have any questions about this or any prior newsletters, please call me at 630-852-1736 or 630-373-7429.

Single Point of Failure

If you've ever been in the situation where your entire office ground to a halt because of some computer or network failure, you already know what a single point of failure (SPOF) is. The official definition is "any part of a system which, should it fail, will halt the entire system". In a computer, that could be a hard disk, a motherboard, or a power supply. But that is a pretty narrowly-focused view of things. The broader scope includes just about anything technology-related in your office, and the level of planning to avoid SPOF's depends on how long you can operate until you are completely halted from doing work. Here are some tips to find, assess, and prepare a plan to deal with SPOF's:

Computer Failure:

If you have only one computer, this becomes important *right now*.

- Always have a data backup ready to go, whether on a flash disk, portable hard disk, or online storage.
- Most libraries have open computer time, if they permit bringing a hard disk, you could continue work there.
 - If you have online backup, you can access it remotely anywhere an internet connection exists.
- Many business copy centers have rental computers you can use on their site, pre-loaded with current software.
 - Example: FedEx/Kinko's business centers, UPS business centers
 - Short-term computer rentals are available in most cities.
- If you have two computers, plan ahead and get units that are of similar speed, capacity and capability.
- Keeping an old computer around may be good enough, as long as it's not too far out of date.
- Find a repair center that can turn around repairs quickly, maybe one day is all you need.

Printer Failure:

Again, if you only have one printer, you can still recover in several ways.

- Keep spare cartridges / paper / cleaning kits available.
- Keep spare parts that wear out frequently in stock, or at least have a source that can ship quickly.
- If you are a college student, most universities have internet-based printers: you can print over the 'net.
- Similarly, the aforementioned business centers offer the same over-the-'net printing capability, then you can pick it up onsite. Additionally, you can print your data onsite from their rental printers.
- Use Adobe PDF to save files in PDF format, you could email it to a friend or co-worker who could print it for you.
- If you have two printers, plan ahead and have them shared or installed on all your computers – it will save a lot of time and searching for printer drivers.

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Power Failure:

- Get a UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) battery backup system – one big enough to keep all your systems running (exception: laser printers – they just use too much electricity):
 - Don't forget to include your internet connection, and internal network equipment.
 - If you get a good-sized UPS, you could operate up to an hour or more before the battery runs down.
- Replace your desktop computers with laptops:
 - Laptops have their own batteries, and can operate up to 4 or 5 hours on a charge.
 - You'll still need a UPS to keep the rest of your network running...
- You could get a gas-powered generator - even a small 1000 watt unit is good enough.

Internet Failure:

If your DSL or Cable internet goes offline, you need to find access quickly.

- Get dual internet connections:
 - Don't bother with dial-up modems to access the internet, way too slow to be useful.
 - I recommend adding ClearWire broadband internet to supplement your DSL or Cable connection.
- If you have laptops, you could travel to the local coffee shop, restaurant, or library and get free wireless access.
 - Examples: Starbucks, Caribou, Panera Bread, McDonald's and other national chains all offer wireless.
 - Nearly all local libraries offer free wireless access.
- If you don't have a laptop, use the local library or the previously mentioned business/copy center computers.

Environmental Issues:

- Keep computers within a safe range of temperatures: between +50 to +90 degrees Fahrenheit is OK.
 - Slightly lower is OK, but going beyond 90 degrees Fahrenheit is asking for trouble.
- If you have a leaky roof, or a leaky faucet above your office, put your computers under a tarp.
 - I have had to recover data from many wet computers...
- Consider using locking devices to anchor computers to desks or walls to deter theft.

Postscript: Apple i-Phone 4

Last month, I made mention of the Apple iPhone 4 antenna flap – the antenna was designed with the antenna wrapped around the outside edge. When users touched it with their fingers, it would drop calls. As of August 7, 2010, Mark Papermaster, Apple's senior vice president of iPhone and iPod hardware engineering was released from his job. Sad, but someone had to take the fall for the serious damage to Apple's otherwise great reputation.

Also, it is a tacit admission by Apple that they are not perfect... but then, no company is perfect, and that will be the subject of next month's issue!

Call me if you wish to have me do an analysis of Single Points Of Failure in your office. If you have questions, comments, or wish to debate about these or any prior topics in my newsletters, please call me at the phone number below, or contact me by email. Thanks for listening!

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