5 ways to prevent data downtime these holidays

For a business owner with a small IT team, the next few weeks are a trying time of year with your workforce reduced as they take their summer holidays.

Lisa Strydom, channel manager lead of Veeam South Africa

With responsibility for services, websites and other IT aspects often spread across a handful of people, losing just one person for two weeks can feel like losing a core part of the business.

Lisa Strydom, channel manager lead of Veeam South Africa, offers some tips to help overcome potential issues.

1. Plan ahead, arrange suitable cover and document your processes

Ensuring your team know the consequences of your website going down, a booking system crashing and losing data, a CRM system not working, or a payment system failing when a customer needs to pay, even if it isn't their direct responsibility, is key at this time of the year.

Create understudies who can act as 'go-to' people, document key processes, and ensure everyone knows the number of your service support partner.

2. Factor in the right data protection

Data is the engine of modern digital business, but the sheer amount of data, and its rapid growth, is a massive challenge for smaller businesses who are focused on their own growth and survival.

Businesses of all sizes need to consider the consequences of not having data available quickly when and where it is needed, from lost revenue due to unplanned outages from an IT systems failure, or even a natural disaster (yes it does happen!), to missed transactions as customers are forced to opt for a competitor if your website is unavailable.

Backing up data is a regular operational activity where, like buying insurance, the true value of a backup investment is only seen when it is needed. Please, test your backups regularly – where every minute is of monetary importance.

3. Security: Have you accounted for the human factor?

It may come as a surprise to hear that human error is a greater cause of data loss than mechanical failure. Accidentally deleting files, transferring files to the wrong person or place, or even a USB being lost, are all issues you probably haven't accounted for.

Regardless of the size of your business, your data is important for its existence each day. As a result of this, and to be compliant with legislation, you must understand who has access to this data and where it is located.

One way to do this is using a technical solution that can map your data. These solutions are only as effective as their definition policies though. Some solutions learn as they gather and analyse data, adding additional definitions to improve results, while others are dependent on manual settings.

In both scenarios, it is of critical importance that the software can discover and map ALL your data, no matter where it is located.

4. Add business value by decreasing IT complexity

The IT employee in your company has to have multiple skills and needs IT solutions that not only make efficiency savings and improve business processes but more importantly, just work because they are often a one-person support team! Adopting a simple and reliable backup solution lessens the burden of the IT staff from many repetitive, time-consuming (but necessary) tasks.

For instance, a small manufacturing company having the confidence that they have consistent access to historic quotations and real-time prices for materials from suppliers, means they have time to think outside the box and design new products for customers.

Particularly when keeping pace with competitors and driving innovation is a key challenge for smaller businesses, they can't be focused on manual and laborious IT tasks. By reducing the cost and time IT staff spend on managing and storing data, they can focus on getting real value from their data and adding value to the business.

5. Cloud first and foremost

When it comes to data management as a small business, keeping it simple is key. Data availability is critical no matter if you're using your own server on-site, a hosted server in the cloud, or a regular server with virtualised servers.

Over the past five years small businesses have quickly adopted cloud-based services due to the cost benefits, and ability to scale up or down a service depending on needs. Data storage and backup are key for any organisation but can consume a considerable amount of budget and staff time.

For that reason, outsourcing storage and backup with service providers through their cloud is a natural fit for smaller businesses. Think cloud when you implement the 3-2-1 backup rule where you have 3 copies of your production data, on 2 different types of media and 1 offsite – that can be on a tape, or in the cloud.

The benefits are clear, but just ensure their data protection and management fits your requirements, and where you would stand should there be data loss or a data breach.