Timing

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

Ever had one of those days, everything you touch seems to go wrong? A colleague phoned to say that after he had sent some mail his hard drive had died. He wanted to know had I received the mail. Fortunately the mail had got through. The dead hard drive did not pull through though.

He explained that calling was not to give me schadenfreude – glee in others misfortune – but more to put things in perspective. Having spent the day fighting with floppy disk sized distros, it was nothing to the frustration of losing your main machines hard disk.

At companies I always preach backups. I assume everyone is of the same mind in that it makes obvious sense. In business it is a quantifiable risk, so you are more likely to spend the money and buy a backup solution. This can be anything from DVD writers to the usual DAT tape systems.

At home the issue becomes a little more clouded. Other things take precedence for your hard earned money such as food, a new bike, or even beer. The choice is often down to a new shiny piece of hardware that will boost your systems power and efficiency, or some boring backup method.

Like everyone else I have good intentions. Little discipline means that whenever I buy a second hard disk I find it quickly becomes full of other data rather than backup archives. Admittedly disk prices are falling as bigger drives come on the market, but there is always the temptation of new data to store.

Spurred on to actually do something about by lack of recent backups, I unearthed all my old tape drives. A quick search found that the media was now uncommon and as a result expensive. Time to get serious with just what I need as a backup.

I have just over half a TeraByte of storage at home. This is not unusual and I know many colleagues with multiple TeraBytes on a home system.

Linux distributions can always be purchased – so there is no need to back those up. MP3 music accounts for over 200GBytes but is not vital as it is all on real CDs somewhere – obviously a general sort out and collation will be required at a later date.

Photos add about 40GBytes, as although some are from wet cameras, the digital images have no other medium. Personal email at 10GB for me is a must for backup. Bookmarks and addressbooks are vital along with my PGP revoke file. These however are kept on PDAs with backup to Flash storage. Text files that would take time to regenerate only add a few megabytes.

I need a 50 + GByte solution which is only one tenth of my used storage. All the files are mirrored onto other drives and machines, but the idea is to avoid panic and worry. Photos were eventually uploaded over a few nights to three separate free web space locations. Letting someone else handle day to day backups, although I will get around to buying another drive and being more disciplined.

Email is the only problem. I have a habit of saving every email. I even have to force myself to empty the spam folders. None of the mail is too personal, but I would obviously rather some people did not get to see some particular emails, taken out of context could hurt their feelings. With this in mind I did not want to place on a web server waiting for some future search engine to access and open to the world. Fourteen CDs later I felt a little more comfortable.

Drinking hot chocolate with a smug look on my face I glanced at an open machines motherboard. To my fascination and horror I watch five capacitors next to the processor all expand, crack and leak. For what seemed like spite, but was probably down to age and heat. The machine is still running although I am a little nervous of rebooting. Even if the board dies the hard disks are fine, but timing is everything. Time for me to start backing up regularly

Trust all is well

John

John Southern
Editor