

TECHNOLOGY FOR SMALL BUSINESS: DATA SECURITY

Now there are no excuses for not backing up

Storage device aims to make computer file backup as simple as toasting bread, Matt Hartley reports

By MATT HARTLEY

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Bryan McLeod likes his technology the way he likes his toasters: simple.

As the chief executive officer of technology startup Storage Appliance Corp., maker of Clickfree, he's hoping to make backing up files as easy as browning a bagel.

As its name suggests, the Toronto-area software company creates data-storage drives and other file backup options that require the user do nothing more than plug them in.

"There's no reason at all this storage shouldn't be just like a toaster, where you just plug it in and it automatically works without any installation or any configuration at all," he said. "You wouldn't want to go to the store and buy a dishwasher or a washing machine and have to then go home and install the software."

Clickfree's devices require no setup, configuration or software installation. Users simply plug the drives into a USB slot and watch as the company's software scours the computer's hard drive for any user-generated files, including photos, Word documents, e-mails or PowerPoint presentations.

The company also produces DVDs that perform the same operations when inserted into a writable drive.

For small businesses with limited budgets, a crashed hard drive or a fried laptop can be disastrous.

"The loss of that data can destroy their business," he said. "Losing a PowerPoint presentation you've worked on for a customer, or a contract, or just e-mail communications about the status of a project can be staggering."

Still, many young companies don't back up files as often as they should, Mr. McLeod said, either because they don't think of it, or because they can't afford the IT help.

"Small businesses just don't have the budget for that kind of stuff," he said. "You're more concerned about what you're selling. But this is automatic and when you totally automate something for someone, they're more inclined to do it."

Backing up files has become even more important as business people traverse the globe.

"In a lot of cases small businesses have sales people who are on the road and travelling," he said. Encouraging them to back up is probably even more difficult than getting the office staff to do so.

"So by giving them something that is totally automatic, you're guaranteed that they're going to do it," he says.

Although the Clickfree drives and discs don't require any setup, companies that use industry-specific software - medical imaging outfits, for example, or accounting firms - can configure the devices to search for specific files.

"No matter what you're working with, most small businesses are based around software applications now," he said. "We can back up that application and all your general office information or just that application."

Clickfree's inventor and Storage Appliance president, Ian Collins, developed the technology to help his mother store photos she was taking with the digital camera he gave her for Christmas a few years ago. The other portable hard drives on the market required installations and setup that was beyond her technical know-how, and he figured there must be an easier way.

Mr. McLeod's technology bets have a tendency to pan out. Before Clickfree, he invested in Intrigue Technologies, a Toronto-based startup that developed the Harmony line of universal television remote controls. In 2004, Mr. McLeod and his partners sold the business to international computer giant Logitech SA. He stayed on to run the division for a few years before joining Clickfree in January.

He sees many similarities between the market conditions that led to the success of the Harmony devices - the growing complexity of televisions - and those that he thinks Clickfree's storage products will capitalize on.

Small businesses and consumers are utilizing the full power of digital technology, relying on software, photos and videos to run their companies. All that critical data needs to be backed up, and Clickfree's products are designed to make the process easy.

"It's exactly the right time again for a completely automated solution to hit the market," he says. "The timing is perfect. When people see it, they say 'that's what I was looking for.'"

Clickfree's 120-gigabyte USB hard drive retails for about \$150; five-packs of the company's DVD backup storage systems cost \$14.99.