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LAPTOP SECURITY/

THE DANGERS OF MOBILITY

Improved performance, battery life and the birth of mobile E-Mail has made the laptop computer an important tool for any worker constantly on the move. Vast quantities of data can now be stored on these devices giving instant access to the files you need.

With this mobility there are dangers however; if you were to lose your laptop how important is the data contained within it to you? And sometimes even more critically, how important is it to others?

Data stored on laptops is too often neglected. A corporate server often will not be able to backup these devices, and many users are notoriously lax at performing manual backups. If the laptop hard drive fails or it is lost/stolen the data stored on it may not be able to be recovered.

If someone else gets their hands on the device, you may find they are able to read your confidential e-mail and files.

BACKING UP YOUR FILES

Ensuring you have a backup of your files is easiest if it occurs automatically. Offline folders is a feature of Windows 2000, and XP. Windows will automatically create a copy of files you specify on the server and store them on your laptop. Changes you make can then automatically be copied back to your server for inclusion in it's backup regime. Issues can occur with offline files however; if multiple people make changes to the files you have access to remotely, conflicts may occur when you next connect your laptop. Care must therefore be taken to ensure files you modify remotely are not going to conflict with other users changes.

If you do not have a dedicated server then performing manual backups may be your only option. This need not be a painstaking task however; with CD-Writers now standard in many laptops your files can be backed up onto one disk. With the correct software package this can be a one step process.

ComputerCare can assist you in configuring your laptop to provide the most suitable backup strategy for you.

SECURING YOUR LAPTOP

Safely restoring your data from backup after your laptop has gone missing is one thing, preventing other people accessing the data requires a different strategy. Several security techniques are available depending on the amount of security required.

Password protecting your user account is a good start, don't use blank, or easy to guess passwords such as "password", or your name. Passwords on mobile devices should be at least ten characters. A good idea is to use a pass phrase, E.g. "The cow jumped over the moon", easy to remember and difficult to guess.

User passwords should not be used as the only solution, removing the hard disk from the computer or using one of many available tools to break the password will allow a persistent person access to your data.

File encryption is built into Windows. By using file encryption individual files can be encrypted and only by logging into Windows with the correct username and password, will the files be viewable. Removing the disk or breaking the password will not allow access. Unfortunately however; if the user forgets their password then access to the encrypted files will be lost.

The use of a BIOS password, and Hard Drive lock will require the use of a password when the laptop is first powered on. Utilizing a password at system power on ensures that Windows security technologies are not your only form of protection.

ENSURING SECURITY

Security should be constantly reviewed to ensure your files are protected. ComputerCare can audit laptops to check what files can be obtained without knowledge of the users password. A report will then be provided detailing what was discovered and steps that can be taken to prevent unauthorized access in the future.

ENFORCING SECURITY

It is important to have a policy in place for laptop security, ensuring users are aware of what security should be in place, and how to protect their data. ComputerCare has templates that can be modified to meet company requirements.



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IT SERVICE SOLUTIONS
33-43 Princess Street
Palmerston North
Phone: 0800 600 606 Fax: 06 356 6217