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There are many myths and inconsistencies around the actual practice of backing up your system data. AAOMS and OMSVision® regularly receive questions on this topic. Here are the best practices we recommend for every AAOMS member to run a safe, secure backup process that takes no time at all—and complies with current and expected future mandates around secure electronic records.

We’ve all been there! After hours of work and effort, the project that you’ve been working on is finally complete. Then, you forget to “Save” the file, all your hard work is lost, and the project needs to be restarted. What a sinking feeling!

Imagine, then, the horror that you would feel if you lost all of your practice data. Patient records, financial accounts, inventory lists, payroll information and more…and then, to make matters even worse, you realize that either you have not been doing your computer backups, or your backup system was not functioning. Besides a panic meltdown, where do you turn at this point?

One of the first questions we are often asked, both at AAOMS and in OMSVision’s customer service center, is: “How do I back up my computer data?” It can feel silly to ask this seemingly basic question, but we at OMSVision realize that this is not a ridiculous question at all. In fact, the reasons that most practices don’t back up are:

- Practices don’t realize the importance;
- They don’t know how; and
- They think they don’t have time to implement what is perceived as a costly, time-consuming process.

Implementing a best-practice electronic backup process is not a luxury you can afford to ignore. It’s essential to the financial well-being of your practice. Even further, HIPAA requirements and meaningful use certification around electronic health records (EHR) may soon mandate secure offsite backup.

So first, let’s look at what it means to back up your practice computers.

Backing up your computer system is exactly what it sounds like: you are simply making a copy of your program files and associated data. But that’s only the first step. Simply backing up your data is not sufficient; you must keep a copy in a safe and secure place, preferably outside the physical confines of your office setting. So, “backup” for oral and maxillofacial surgery practices needs to include not only copying your data, but also your programs, settings and your operating system.

Backing up can seem complicated when you look at the amount of information that needs to be secured, how much to back up and most importantly, how and when to back up. However, the assumption that e-backup is costly OR time-consuming is a MYTH, and we’re always happy to help dispel it!

The goal is simple: back up your computer and associated data to protect your practice. If something should ever happen to your office or system, and you can no longer access your data, then you can always reconstruct your system from a backup. Consider the friends and colleagues you know who have ever had to replace a hard drive in a personal computer. Most of us know someone who has done this, or have experienced it ourselves multiple times. When this happens, you are in a totally helpless predicament. Data loss can put your practice out of commission for days or even weeks, but luckily, the solution to the goal is also simple: if you’re backed up, you can usually continue operations as long as you have functional computers.

The right questions will establish the right process

When setting up your backup process, asking the following questions will keep you on a productive path to achieve the right backup for your practice.
How do I get started?
The first step is copying your data. When you think about this, it should be very simple. Backing up your data is very basic. However, in your practice you need to back up more than just your data. In case of a disaster, you will need to reconstruct all of your information. This type of backup has one goal: your backup creates a functional copy to be stored on an offsite server. If your data is located in the same location as your computer, then you are not securely backed up. This begs the next question.

Where should I store my data?
The best answer is just common sense: copy your data to a server that lives outside the walls of your practice. The further, the better, especially in light of the fact that disaster can strike at any time, and can affect your whole geographic region. Again, if your data is in only one place, and there are no copies, then you’re not backed up.

When and how often should we back up?
The more important the data, the more frequently you will want to run your backup and the more backup copies you should have at various locations. The importance and new entry growth cycle of your data is something that only you can judge. OMSVision’s recommended best practice to our users is to set your backup to occur daily, at midnight, AND weekly, on Fridays at midnight.

Common approaches
At OMSVision’s customer service center, we deal with many common questions about data loss directly related to hard drive failure. Alongside hard drive failure, we regularly hear about accidental deletion of documents or information stored on the hard drive.

There are many different approaches to backing up your data. Internal backup within your practice is the first place to start. Make sure you run your backup tapes on a daily basis and have an “end of the week” backup tape. Make sure your backup duplicates to a secure site that is outside the confines of your practice.

This could be as simple as using an external USB hard disk. However, if you have more than one practice location, more than one practice computer, OR if you run an extremely busy practice (don’t we all?), this solution has its limits, not the least of which is keeping all those USB drives organized and inventoried.

Solution: automatic e-backup
The best option is to partner with an automated backup program that is offsite and backed up to multiple remote servers on a regular, daily basis. The best part? With an automated program, you never have to touch a hard drive, a mouse or a server. You can receive automatic alerts via e-mail or text, every time your backup happens—and that’s it! Your backup is instant, consistent and secure. The OMSVision support team can help you set this up in a matter of days.

Some practices do both an internal backup and an external backup. This may not protect you from total disaster, but it will certainly protect you from the most common causes of data loss. If your hard drive crashes, having the proper backup will help our Customer Service Representatives restore your files and most likely your entire system, from your backup files, with the click of a button. We can also locate accidentally deleted files, as long as the backup is completed and functional on a daily or hourly basis. Backup training is something that we take very seriously at OMSVision.

Having proper and secure backup protects your practice from financial disasters and also allows your data to be reconstructed. Very soon, automatic e-backup may be the key to total compliance with emerging legislative initiatives on electronic health records. Don’t wait—identify a solution for your practice now.

Securing your data is simple, fast and affordable
In closing, data backup is of utmost importance. This is a function that cannot be overlooked, and can be easily accomplished on a daily basis. Without functioning backups, trying to rescue a practice system is virtually impossible. It is certainly more fiscally prudent to have proper backup systems in place, than to finance a practice reconstruction. As your practice changes, you must monitor the importance and growth of your practice data, and require ever stronger building blocks to continue maximizing practice profitability.

For every member, AAOMS strongly recommends implementing an electronic backup solution as soon as possible. When you continually monitor and flex your process as your practice grows, you will achieve the best possible return from your investment. OMSVision offers an e-Backup license with every unit sold, and Henry Schein Practice Solutions has untethered backup solutions available to users of other practice management software. For more information, visit www.OMSVision.com/partners/ebackup.