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Tech Watch: Cloud backup options gain credibility slowly but surely

Despite the demise of several public cloud storage service offerings in the past year, solution providers say cloud-based backup and storage solutions are finding a following among their smaller business clientele.

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The benefits of [cloud storage services](#)

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There are two reasons. First, virtualization advances have improved backup and disaster recovery options. Second, there is strong desire among small businesses to simplify data management. It turns out that the reason many small businesses shunned backup solutions in the past wasn't necessarily because such solutions weren't relevant. It was because few small businesses have the wherewithal to deal with shuffling tapes and other storage media.

"Nobody even questions cloud backup and disaster recovery anymore," said Richard Vaughn, vice president and co-founder of [i-Tech Support](#) Inc., an Orlando, Fla., solution provider. "I don't have any regular customer that has a tape drive anymore – or, for that matter, anyone who has any backup storage on-site. In selling these solutions, we used to have to emphasize the encryption we use, the multisite aspect, where the data will be, and so forth. They don't even ask anymore."

It is important to distinguish between what solution providers like i-Tech Support recommend and the services that have shuttered in the past year. What they recommend includes commodity cloud storage services offered by giant [Iron Mountain](#). According to a research note issued by Gartner Inc., Iron Mountain plans to transfer users of its Virtual File Store service to a "higher-value offering" called [Nearpoint File System Archiving](#) in 2012. Nearpoint will be a hybrid that leverages policy-based archiving on site and in the cloud with indexing and classification capabilities."

The cloud services that solution providers recommend are more explicitly positioned as online backup options.

Guy Baroan, founder and CEO of [Baroan Technologies](#) in Elmwood Park, N.J., said one factor in the rise of cloud backup services has been changes to some of the most widely used backup management tools. Many of these applications now allow you to specify a cloud service as the option for image-based backups. That means a whole snapshot of your server or system is taken, rather than just specific files and data. That means faster potential recovery times in the event of a failure.

"That step is huge. We can now take an image and save it to the cloud. If you have a failure, you can turn on your images in the cloud and continue running as if you were in the office," Baroan said. "If the client can never be down, this is one option."

There are several established and startup companies exploring cloud-based backup services that have specific programs or partnership opportunities for the IT channel. They include the likes of [Doyenz](#), which bills itself as a cloud-based disaster recovery service; [DoubleTake Cloud](#) (now a part of Vision Solutions); [Mozy](#) (now

part of EMC); and the BDR appliance and service from [Zenith Infotech](#).

Other frequently mentioned companies with an angle for small businesses include [Backblaze](#), [Carbonite](#) and [Zmanda](#). Cloud file services are also on the radar of giants Microsoft, which fields [Windows Live SkyDrive](#) and Google, which is expanding the storage available to its cloud applications suite.

But any cloud computing implementation has its risks: Just this week, [both Amazon and Google suffered major outages](#) that interrupted service and access for hours.

Ryan O'Ramsay Barrett, CEO of technology service provider [Oram Corporate Advisors](#) in Boston, said one of his biggest considerations when recommending a cloud backup service is ensuring that his customer can access thorough reports and backup logs for compliance purposes. He also looks closely at the funding and back-end data center capabilities of the services that his company uses. "All of our clients take this into account," Barrett said.

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About the expert

Heather Clancy is an award-winning business journalist in the New York area with more than 20 years experience. Her articles have appeared in Entrepreneur, Fortune Small Business, the International Herald Tribune and The New York Times. Clancy was previously editor at Computer Reseller News, a B2B trade publication covering news and trends about the high-tech channel.

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