

# Peer to Peer

## Risky Business



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## Small Firm, Big Plan: Chester Willcox and Saxbe LLP

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**M**ost small firms have rudimentary risk mitigation practices in place, but many believe that going beyond the basics is cost prohibitive. Good risk mitigation practices, procedures and systems are a solid investment for a firm regardless of size.

Thinking of all the “bad things” waiting to happen can consume a good portion of any manager’s day; and, in fact, determining and preparing for business interruptions is a worthwhile endeavor. Working in a single location, I sometimes daydream about having another office for redundancy. It would be nice to have my own WAN accelerator and a “hot site” that was our backup in the event of disaster. Then I come to my senses and remember how much I like keeping things simple! There is always risk; my task is to balance what is acceptable risk and to mitigate what is not. Until, that is, the price tag is larger than our budget.

### PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL

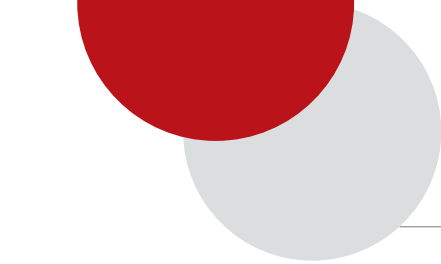
Businesses of all sizes need disaster recovery plans for woes small and large that can befall them. For example, they need to have an extra hard drive for the array, some

UPS units, backups that actually work and an extra switch. These are the relatively easy pieces of the puzzle. But what happens when you lose the whole server room to water damage? Or what if power is disrupted for several days? Or what if an event near you prevents onsite access for an extended period? These are real possibilities, but do they warrant the cost of a completely redundant failover site? It would certainly be ideal, and it would certainly be expensive.

### THE CLOUD IS THE “PIE IN THE SKY”

So how do small firms plan for business interruptions while keeping the expense of those plans in check? This firm’s answer: Cloud computing.

Consider for a moment the cost savings in not having to maintain an e-mail server: No onsite backup systems, no hardware, no licensing, no maintenance, and the “server” is immune to the broken water main above the data center. Sure, there is a monthly fee per user, but it is surprisingly low. Now, factor in the data replication to two entirely different geographic areas, hosted in a very secure facility, with power generators and around-the-clock technicians who specialize in e-mail server operations and security. If users can get an Internet connection, they can access e-mail, even if the office is offline for any reason. That’s one way for small firms to mitigate risk and reduce costs.



Now consider doing the same thing with the document management system. Building redundant servers and co-locating them have similar costs for implementation, whether you're a 10 attorney firm or 500 attorney firm. Hosted solutions for e-mail and document management, based on number of users, provide an attractive, affordable solution.

## VIRTUALLY RISK-FREE

At Chester Willcox and Saxbe LLP, there are servers that remain on premise; yet, we've controlled costs by utilizing virtualization. Server virtualization allows, to some extent, redundant hardware. If I have to restore an entire server, and it is virtualized, I can quickly restore it to different hardware. In this manner, we're addressing the risks of losing one server and losing an entire server room. Additionally, it is possible to restore just a file or two files from backup images when just one user has a personal disaster.

Virtualization also provides some potential savings on licensing. An enterprise version of the Windows server license permits up to four guest machines to be virtualized. Translation: Buy one enterprise server license, install four virtualized servers. Use virtualization not only to mitigate risk, but also to save costs on licensing and hardware.

## TWO WORDS TO THE WISE

Whether you're just building your risk management framework or you're putting the polish on a fully redundant hot site, there are two practices that will ensure success: communicate and test!

**Communicate.** One of the biggest points made from seasoned disaster recovery planners is that a communications plan is fundamental to the effectiveness of any plan, large or small. The costs involved are minimal and based on user counts, and the tools available for large firms work just as well for small firms. The only obstacle is getting contact information put into a system, testing it, and keeping it updated. It is difficult to prepare for every possible disaster, but having a framework in place to communicate with employees when "bad things happen" is a good place to start.

**Test.** Be sure to test all systems in place for the recovery of information in case of loss or the failover to other systems in the event of interruption.

Whether in the cloud, in the data center, or virtually in the data center, your firm's intellectual capital and the ability to connect to clients are too valuable to put at risk. Even small firms need big plans. **ILTA**