Storage providers offer ease of mind

By: Tom Venetis
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Murray Smith still remembers the day a little over a month ago when the value of using a storage service provider (SSP) really made itself apparent.

On that day, Smith, CEO of the Toronto-based business-consulting firm OneCoach Inc. had what he calls a "catastrophic equipment failure." His laptop with all of his business, client and personal information failed and had to be sent to the shop for repairs. However, the shop could not retrieve any of the data from his defunct hard drive. Smith could not afford to be without that information.

Smith was only able to recover from this near financial disaster by using the services of Toronto-based Global Data Vaulting Inc., a provider of managed backup and restore services, to help him get his data and database back in a very short period of time. Smith had been using Global Data Vaulting to regularly backup and manage all of his company's data and business information, and to store that information off-site.

"In the span of three hours my entire database, that once existed on my computer the night before, was downloaded onto a loaner laptop," Smith said. "The level of service they gave us was worth tens of thousands of dollars in the environment we deal with each day."

Jeff Beallor, president of Global Data Vaulting says more companies like OneCoach are turning to SSPs like his to help them protect and manage vital business and customer data. Companies are finding the biggest cost of storage is not the capital costs of the storage hardware, but the management costs. This includes having full-time staff whose job it is to manage and maintain the data on systems and to help get data back if something goes wrong.

For smaller businesses, like the many accounting firms that use Global Data Vaulting, the cost of doing all that is quite prohibitive. For such companies, Global Data Vaulting can regularly schedule automated backups of all company data, manage the data and make sure it is available quickly if there is a need to get at it for whatever reason.

This frees up the IT department to help the business make money instead of worrying about managing and storing data, Beallor added.

Global Data Vaulting is one of a growing number of companies International Data Corp. (Canada) said are devoted to delivering storage utility and on-demand services to Canadian businesses. Similar to the model used by application service providers, SSPs essentially make backup and recovery a service so that the business does not need to incur the cost of buying and managing storage and backup on-site.

Alan Freedman, research manager for infrastructure hardware with IDC (Canada) in Toronto said most large businesses are using SSPs for disaster recovery and security of data, to have backups in case something catastrophic goes wrong and data is lost or corrupted on the business site. "People and businesses want to have a copy of their data and what they are looking for from the SSPs are backup expertise, disaster recovery and business continuity," he added.

In a study on the SSP market in Canada, Storage Service Please: SSPs Start to Make Progress Again, Freedman found a great deal of acceptance for the SSP model amongst large and mid-sized businesses. The reason is very much the cost savings that Global Data Vaulting's Beallor mentioned.

"Management cost is the real key here," Freedman continued. "Managing information and making it available is in fact a more significant cost than the physical storage mechanisms."

A big driver for using SSPs amongst businesses is the new regulatory environment in Canada and the United States. Recent legislative measures such as Sarbanes-Oxley in the United States and PIPEDA and HIPPA in Canada for example, have made managing and storing corporate and private information front-and-center for many businesses. Freedman said the reason is rather simple — making sure that data is backed up, stored and managed on a regular basis by a third-party, ensures that data is protected and can be accessed quickly if there is a need to examine that data's integrity if a request is made under something like Sarbanes-Oxley, PIPEDA or HIPPA.

But what mattered most for Smith was getting his data back quickly and knowing the data is available at any time it is needed if something like the equipment failure he had ever happens again.