

Warning: Cloud Data at Risk

Relying on software-as-a-service vendors to back up your data is a dangerous but alarmingly common mistake, according to new research.



AMAG Pharmaceuticals Inc. is like many businesses these days. Looking to cut costs and increase agility, the Waltham, Mass.-based specialty drug maker uses software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications for a variety of critical business functions including productivity applications like Google Apps. Yet AMAG is unlike most other businesses in one crucial respect.

“We’ve never had data loss,” says Steve Simmons, the company’s director of IT and senior cloud architect.

By contrast, fully 58 percent of businesses that utilize SaaS applications have suffered a data loss of some kind in the last 12 months, according to an exclusive new survey of IT and business managers from IDG Research. AMAG isn’t one of them chiefly because it uses a cloud-based service from Spanning Cloud Apps Inc. that backs up all of its SaaS data and makes missing information easily recoverable. “That’s a really big deal for us,” Simmons says.

That’s not the case for every organization today. Instead, as the IDG Research study reveals, a shockingly large percentage of SaaS users are making the same dangerous mistake: assuming that SaaS vendors have all their data protection needs covered.

A Scary Proposition

Painful and common as it is, data loss has done

little to slow the rising popularity of cloud computing. According to the IDG Research study, in fact, some 56 percent of companies currently use a cloud-based email solution, 47 percent use a cloud-based storage solution, and 33 percent use a cloud-based CRM solution.

The vast majority of those businesses believe they’re safe from data loss. Indeed, a whopping 68 percent of participants in the IDG Research poll say they’re either extremely or very confident that their SaaS provider can restore lost data, and another 27 percent say they’re at least somewhat confident. Furthermore, 50 percent of cloud-based CRM users, 48 percent of cloud-based email users, and 38 percent of cloud-based storage users actually rely on SaaS vendors for their data protection needs, according to the IDG Research study.

“That’s a scary proposition,” warns Jason Buffington, a senior analyst and data protection expert at Enterprise Strategy Group Inc., a leading IT research, analysis, and strategy firm. While most SaaS providers do a great job of protecting data from catastrophic infrastructure failures, he notes, they leave customers defenseless against the many other ways data can vanish—most of which originate with those very same users.

“It is critical for users to remember that, as a matter of policy, SaaS vendors follow the users’ direction when it comes to managing data,” observes David Hoff, CTO of Cloud Sherpas, a global cloud advisory and technology services company headquartered in Atlanta. If you tell your SaaS provider to delete something, the provider promises to delete it. Unfortunately, your SaaS vendor has no idea if that request was legitimate or a mistake, a hacker, or a rogue integration program. “In any of these cases, your data is permanently removed and unrecoverable,” Hoff says.

Sync errors can be just as treacherous, observes Jeff Erramouspe, Spanning’s president and CEO. For example, users of SaaS storage solutions like Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive often shut off their computer before their latest changes have been processed. “That leaves them with files that are sort of half-synced,” Erramouspe notes.

To make matters worse, some SaaS providers either won’t or can’t recover critical types of data, like contacts and calendar appointments in Google

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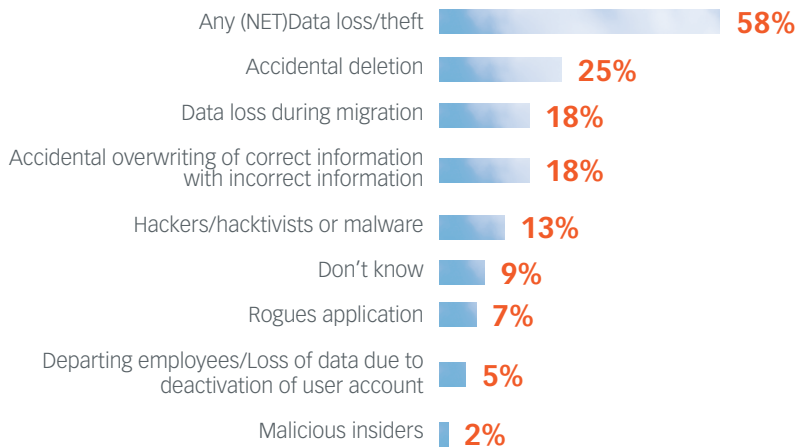
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SPANNING

SaaS Data Loss Events Experienced in the Past 12 Months

Nearly six in ten report their organizations have experienced a SaaS data loss event in the past 12 months, most often by accidental deletion.



Source: IDG Research Services; Base: 65 qualified respondents

Apps, while others, like Salesforce.com, charge thousands of dollars and require weeks of waiting time before restoring lost information.

Essential Features

Cloud-to-cloud backup and restore services like Spanning's offer the only surefire protection from these data loss risks. Such solutions automatically copy SaaS data and metadata to another cloud infrastructure, empowering organizations to quickly and easily recover missing records, and at no additional expense no matter why they disappeared. "Using a cloud-to-cloud backup and restore service ensures that secure copies of your data are available to be restored in the event of data loss, whether you've accidentally deleted something, someone else maliciously removed your information, or you decide you need a document you intentionally deleted after all," says Hoff.

To appreciate how valuable that safety net can be, look no further than AMAG Pharmaceuticals. Its users have inadvertently deleted important files just like users at most every company. In AMAG's case, however, the damage was only temporary. "Spanning bailed us out," Simmons says.

Cloud backup solutions aren't all alike, however, so finding one with the right features is essential. For starters, the system must be easy to use and

highly automated. "The backup has to happen in an almost unattended way—set it and forget it," Erramouspe says. Recovering data should be equally simple, he continues, so enabling end users to restore their missing data quickly without help from IT is important.

Flexibility and granularity are vital as well. Users should be free to recover one document, one folder, or everything they own in either its latest form or from an earlier point in time. The system should also restore data directly to the SaaS application it came from, rather than send over a big pile of data and make you complete the recovery process manually. "The best backup solutions allow you to quickly, accurately, and completely restore data from any previous point in time directly back into your SaaS applications. In other words, you should be able to get your data back in exactly the state it was before you lost it," Hoff says.

A good cloud backup solution also utilizes proven, scalable, and reliable cloud platforms like Amazon Web Services and comes with industry-standard security controls and intuitive, comprehensive reporting tools. "Your vendor should provide you with complete transparency about what's been backed up and what hasn't," Erramouspe says.

The provider should utilize state-of-the-art security processes too, Simmons adds, and provide prompt, effective support. "If there's an emergency you need to be able to pick up the phone and get a human," he says.

Last but not least, look for a vendor that stands behind the promises it makes. "If you believe you can back up and recover data accurately every time, you should put your money where your mouth is," Erramouspe says. Spanning, for example, offers a 100 percent restore guarantee for Google Apps backup that gives customers 10x their money back for one year of the user's account if ever they fail to restore the data they backed up.

Such failures are rare, of course, but that's the whole point. SaaS applications are every bit as safe as on-premises solutions if you take the proper precautions. Companies that use a state-of-the-art cloud application backup and recovery service like Spanning's can rest assured they've done everything in their power to collect the cloud's benefits without exposing themselves to the risk of data loss. To learn more, visit www.spanning.com.