Disaster Planning for the Dental Office

Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Unfortunately, according to Murphy's Law, it will also happen at the most inopportune time and at a maximum cost. There really isn't much you can do to stop it. Bad things do happen - even to good people. What you can do is prepare for it.

Sometimes bad things take the form of a natural disaster

Consider COVID-19 that forced practices to shut down during the pandemic. Or the earthquakes in California which completely destroyed dental and medical offices. There was nothing left to salvage in the practice – just rubble. No charts, no chairs, no computer systems. Hurricane Katrina resulted in a similar situation for the offices in New Orleans. Everything was destroyed. Charts were totally unusable, computer systems were not salvageable nor was the data on them retrievable.
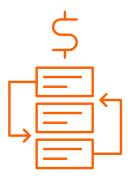
Sometimes catastrophes are very personal

A burglary can greatly disrupt a dental or medical office routine. The office manager arrives in the morning to find the door broken open and the place a mess. Papers scattered on the floor can be cleaned up fairly easily and the stolen computer can also be replaced. But the information on it might very well be a different story.

Then there is the technical problem. Something like a hard disc or controller card goes bad and scrambles all the data on your server. This type of problem can take hours or days just to diagnose. By then the cost of the hardware failure is considerably more expensive.

Preparation is the key

Consider the prevention plan needed to accommodate for the potential computer theft or computer component failure in a client/server architected system. There are many points that need to be addressed. You will need a second server, equal in capacity and speed to the first. Additionally, a separate power source should be secured so that power to your building would still not be a single point of failure. Further, you need sophisticated software that manages storing and retrieving duplicate data from two separate servers to ensure that if one fails, the other is ready to take over. Also, those two servers should be located in different physical locations, sufficiently separated to ensure that a fire, earthquake, or flood would not take both of them out.

In short, to prepare for uninterrupted service for a client/server system, a dentist would need to spend five to ten times as much money on equipment, configuration, line and power services, monitoring, etc. and then hire an experienced IT consultant who would spend a lot of time to get this done. After it is all set up, the whole system needs to be maintained and monitored. It simply is not practical for a dentist to put these resources towards the problem of making a client/server based system sufficiently redundant to accommodate and size disaster.

Preparation is the key (continued)

Does that mean that you just have to live with the risk? If you are using a client/server based dental software system, the answer is "yes". There are things you can do to help mitigate incrementally, but you cannot, for a reasonable cost, cobble together a solution that addresses the core issue.

Some offices choose to have a spare computer on hand for just such a situation. But what about the data? Is it secure? With a cloud-based solution, all data back-ups are saved and stored automated professionally in a top-tier Amazon Web Services (AWS) data center.

The AWS data center makes the need for restoring data from backups extremely rare. It is not uncommon for a robust cloud-based system to not require backups. However, in the unlikely event that a backup is needed, they are made every hour of every day (and night). Nobody has to remember to run the backup nor does the storage device need to be taken home for "off-site" protection. They are automatically backed up and electronically taken off-site. Each backup is verified to ensure that it will work if needed.

No dentist can build this type of infrastructure on their own, nor can a client/server system offer this type of redundancy and data protection. It's just not feasible using a client/server technology.

Consider a Cloud-based alternative to dental software

With a Cloud-based system, you don't have a server in your office with patient data on it because data is located on the web. All you need is an internet connection.

If there is any event that makes your office computers inoperable, you simply purchase a new computer with internet access. In the case of a geographic disaster, your office may be gone, but your patient clinical and billing information is intact and insurance collections can continue. In the case of a stolen computer you simply go to your favorite computer store for a replacement and plug it in. It's that simple.

About Curve Dental

Founded in 2004, Curve Dental provides cloud-based dental software and related services to dental practices within the United States and Canada. The company is privately held, with offices in Provo, Utah, and Calgary, Alberta. The company strives to make dental software less about computers and more about user experience. Their creative thinking can be seen in the design of their software, that's easy to use and built only for the web.

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