



Celebrating 30 years serving Central, N.C.

November 2020

Your Holiday Checklist for Closing the Office

During the holidays, many offices shut down in a way that they do not throughout the rest of the year. For these rare few days, you may be completely inaccessible to customers and unable to help employees who are trying to sneak in a little extra work through the holidays. Use this checklist to make sure that you have shut down the office correctly--and that you are able to get everything back up and running smoothly again when the holidays are over.

1. Tell People You Are Shutting Down

Both your customers and your employees need to know how long your business will be shut down for the holidays. Provide notice well in advance. Depending on the types of services you offer, you may need to start notifying customers as early as a month out. It would be best if you were to provide these important notifications at least two weeks before the holiday shutdown. Employees should also be reminded regularly that the company will not be open during those important days.

2. Keep Notifying

In spite of your best efforts to notify people ahead of time, not everyone will get the notification that you're going to be shut down. Make sure that you:

- Post signs about the shutdown and when you will be back
- Change your voicemail message and have a plan for what to do if your voicemail is full: will it notify you? Is there an alternate number to call?
- Put together and "out of office" email that lets people who attempt to contact you know when you will be back
- Make sure you have a call tree for emergencies, and that everyone knows who he or she will be responsible for calling in the event of an emergency

Make sure that customers who attempt to contact you know when you expect to be in the office again. Most customers will understand the desire to devote time and energy to the family during the holidays, but they want to know when you'll be back to provide them with your usual excellent customer service.

3. Shut Down the Office

Walk through your office and take a look at your electronics and other potential energy drains. Since you will not be in the office, there is no reason to pay for electricity that you are not using. Make sure that you handle your shutdown properly.

Turn off your personal computer and other computers throughout the office.

Upcoming Events

Webinar:
**Stakeholder
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Strategies for
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November 3, 2020

Webinar:
Cloud Strategy
November 17, 2020

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Note that servers do not need to be shut down for the holidays and should be left up and running. Fax machines, refrigeration systems, and security systems should also be left running normally.

- Check your thermostat. You can drop the thermostat several degrees while you are gone for the holidays, resulting in significant energy savings.
- Turn off and unplug fans and heaters.
- Unplug any chargers and other cords that are usually left plugged in.
- Close curtains and blinds to help maintain internal temperature and keep potential thieves from taking a peek inside.
- Check your emergency procedures. What happens if there is a fire at the office while everyone is away? What if someone is in the office over the holidays--to pick up paperwork to review at home, for example--and they notice a problem? Make sure these policies are posted so that any key holder can access them.

4. Physically Secure the Office

Physical security is just as important as managing your technology when you are gone for the holidays. Take these key steps to ensure that your office is indeed locked up tight.

- Make sure no keys are left sitting out where they are easy to see or access.
- Check with security to make sure that they have keys to get in the building.
- Check security systems and cameras to be sure that they are fully functional. Make sure that the security system is sending a notification to someone who is actually in town for the holidays, not a manager who is going to be across the country!
- Lock up desks and filing cabinets, especially those that contain sensitive information. Place all keys in a safe location.
- Check doors and windows to be sure that they are locked.
- Review your incident response plan. Do you have a plan for how to respond when everyone is out of the office? This can include everything from a hacker going after your data to a physical emergency at the office.

With the holidays fast approaching, you want to be sure that everything is put together properly throughout your office so that when you return, you can get everything back up and running smoothly. By following this simple checklist, you can ensure that your office is ready for the holidays--and as prepared as possible for any unprecedented challenges while you are out of the office.

5 Proven Ways CPAs Can Avoid Disaster for Tax Season

It is the week before taxes are due. Your accounting firm is busy filing data and finishing last minute client needs. Suddenly, no one is able to access the tax preparation software. Someone checks on the server, only to find it has stopped its constant buzzing and the lights are off. You are not sure what this means, but you know that people are unable to do their work.

With an ever-growing problem, how much will this cost you? Your firm may lose tens of thousands of dollars' worth of profit. If you do not have backups, you will have to pay your employees to reenter data. Redoing work prevents your firm from assisting current clients, which can snowball into unhappy customers and a bad reputation.

With potential consequences as damaging as these, every firm should look for ways to avoid downtime.

Here are five ways to help you avoid downtime for the upcoming tax season:

1. Use a Network Monitoring System

Everything comes down to monitoring the way your network is running. Network Monitoring Systems tell you if your network is in 'danger,' and gives reports about what is happening in real time. You will know your servers CPU response time, disk write delays, memory utilization, overall network availability, and more. Therefore, you will not have to guess what is happening on your network, giving you peace of mind.

2. Updating or Buying New Equipment

For many accounting firms, this is a hassle because they do not have the budget to buy new hardware. However, if a professional instructs you to buy new equipment, then you should do this as soon as you can afford it. You never know if your server will break in the midst of tax season, causing downtime at the worst time possible for you.

The idea of updating old equipment is similar to not taking advice from your auto mechanic, who tells you that you need a new engine because yours is overheating.

You decide to only cool it down with water, preventing engine failure and saving you money from buying a new engine. A month later your engine dies. In the end, waiting to replace old equipment can cost you more than you think.

3. Install and Update Firewalls

One essential way to keep your firm less vulnerable to downtime is installing a current model firewall. However, just installing a firewall will not be enough; you must make sure your firewall has updated software and the latest security patches installed regularly. Doing this will prevent the downtime your organization can receive after a hacker cracks your weak password: Panthers#1Fan, and then uses your account to send phishing emails to your entire client list.

4. Testing Employees Security Knowledge

Network downtime can come from human error, such as an employee clicking or downloading malicious files over email or social media. Managers should enforce security assessments that help employees notice the characteristics of a scam or a malicious email. For example, your employee might be unaware of CEO Fraud. So, they get an email with the CEO's email address and make the wire transfer that he or she wanted them to do for as much money as stated in the email. Then, hackers pick up the transferred funds from an offshore account, preventing you from ever getting your money back. By using security tests, employers can feel secure knowing their employees are preventing downtime costs because they know about scams such as this one.

5. Testing Backups

Backups are critical to the survival of your organization when disaster strikes. Many organizations are not testing their backups to confirm their integrity. How often should you test your backups? It depends on how valuable your data is. If the organization can not survive to lose a day of data, you probably need to test your backups daily. If you are not regularly testing your backups, you may be in for an unpleasant surprise when you need your backups the most. For example, if Ransomware infects the network during tax season, but the backups did not work, then this could be a crisis. Not only will your organization lose more money from extended downtime, but essentially they will lose the money spent to keep the backups. Therefore, frequently testing your backups is a must when trying to avoid long periods of downtime.

When tax season rolls around, the last thing your accounting firm will want is network downtime. Therefore, your firm should enforce these five tips before the busyness

of tax season stops you from thinking about anything else. For more information about ways to avoid network downtime during tax season, contact Total Computer Solutions.

Employee Retention with Corporate Chaplains of America



Can we Talk about Employee Retention?

Corporate Chaplains of America is looking to partner with you to care for your employees and bring hope and fulfillment to your greatest asset, your people.

CCA's Chaplaincy Program can greatly enhance existing employee care efforts and allows for increased employee engagement with an immediate return of higher productivity, lower turnover, greater job satisfaction and an overall better quality of life. Chaplaincy helps you care for your employees like your heart desires, but your title and time will not allow.

Corporate Chaplains of America partners with companies, providing permission-based care for employees as they navigate through life's inevitable challenges. Chaplains provide care for employees by making weekly, on-site visits, briefly engaging with each employee as they are available. Those short visits are voluntary, permission-based, and confidential and could be as simple as a word of encouragement. Many times, those conversations turn into extended "Care Sessions" addressing family issues, financial concerns, hospital visits, grief care and many other issues impacting the employee's life and morale at work. With over 250 certified Chaplains serving nearly 400,000 employees and family members across the nation, every employee and every family member of an employee has access to receive Chaplain care 24/7. For more information visit <https://chaplain.org/what-is-chaplaincy/>.

"As a business owner you can tell when an employee is having issues at home because it impacts their work life. We have found that having a Chaplain, who operates confidentially like an attorney or physician, allows our employees to discuss things with the chaplain that they would never be willing to share with their leadership," Barry Utesch, President, Total Computer Solutions.

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*Guide to Understanding
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Guide to Understanding Managed Services

As your business grows and thrives, so does your data and IT demands, and sooner or later, successful organizations find themselves at a critical decision-making crossroads. From a business perspective, it is an excellent problem to have, a healthy sign that the business shows robust growth, but it is a growing pain, which cannot be ignored without consequences. Throughout this guide, we will walk you through managed services and provide suggestions for choosing whether it is right for you.

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