

Inexpensive components will protect computers

By Kiman Wong

At the beginning of the year, I wrote a column on New Year's resolutions -- specifically, how to protect your data and secure your PC.

I know this topic has been covered extensively, but despite the repetition, many users still want to believe that bad things won't happen to them.

Don't kid yourself.

Although the likelihood of a terrorist attack in Ko Olina or Kakaako is pretty remote, as Murphy's Law dictates, things that can go wrong will go wrong.

You don't necessarily need Osama to spoil your day. There are plenty of nasty surprises such as flooding, power failures, fire, theft or other tragedies that can befall your home or business.

You don't have to spend a lot of money to ensure that your home business will weather trials and tribulations of biblical proportions. Rather than coaching you on preparing a disaster recovery plan, in the next few columns, I'm going to suggest some inexpensive technology that will ensure that if disaster strikes you can be up and running in short order.

There are some inexpensive ways to protect your PC from what we might term "everyday disasters." Chief among them are voltage abnormalities and loss of electrical power. Just as fatal are power losses (partial or total) caused by tripping over your power plug. (Hey, we've all done this.)

The best insurance policy you can buy is a UPS. I'm not talking about those brown delivery trucks. A UPS, or uninterruptible power supply, is a vital component of any home office. When the power goes out, the UPS switches on automatically, ensuring that your computers and network can run long enough for you to shut down your computer until HECO gets back on line. A home office model, which also acts to shield your computer from dips and surges in the electrical system, costs about \$150.

A UPS comes in a variety of configurations, depending on your system's requirements.

UPS capacity generally is measured in battery life. Thus the more equipment (monitor, cable modem, etc.) you need to keep operating during an outage, the larger capacity you'll need. The rule of thumb is to get overcapacity, even if it costs more. The APC Web site (www.apc.com) has a good tool to determine the UPS system you'll need.

You can also purchase a UPS from companies such as Tripplite (www.tripplite.com), SL Waber (www.waber.com) and others.

The more sophisticated UPS models also have software that automatically saves files and shuts down your system. This works great in theory, but sometimes the software will collide with your existing system and cause it to crash. When you install your UPS, make certain that you test it by pulling the plug from the socket to see if it really shuts down the computer. Of course, make sure you save your documents before you do the test.

If you don't want to spend money on a UPS, at the very minimum get a good surge suppressor -- a device that acts as a buffer between your wall outlet and your computer. A surge protector redirects power surges through an alternate path of least resistance and protects your gear from extreme surges in voltage. In effect, it absorbs the voltage spikes and dissipates them before they harm your PC.

Surge suppressors eventually wear out, but the better quality ones have an indicator light that flashes when they have been damaged. If you are subject to frequent storms or brownouts, it's best to replace them every three or four years.

When purchasing a suppressor look for the "UL 1449" mark, which means that it's up to code with Underwriters Laboratories specs. Most suppressors will also list their joules rating, which is a way of telling how much of a surge the suppressor potentially can absorb. In general, the higher the rating, the better. I'd say purchase an absorber with at least a 300-joules rating. This will cost you in the range of \$30-\$50.

If you want to do more homework on protecting your gear from electrical abnormalities, go to HECO's Web site (www.heco.com), which provides useful tips and offers more ideas on purchasing surge protectors and UPS gear.

In our next column we'll look at how you can make sure your data is backed up properly so that in a worst-case scenario, you'll always have copies of your records.

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