Data Backups

In today's IT environment, being in charge of [data backups](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/tip/Effective-data-backups-Seven-rules-to-follow) usually means two roles: [backup operator](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/tip/Secure-backups-require-more-than-just-encrypting-data) and backup administrator. Daily tasks such as making sure backups completed, ejecting tapes from a library and inserting scratch tapes have traditionally been the responsibilities of backup operators. Not that there is anything wrong with it, but these tasks can be pretty mundane and eventually lead you directly to your supervisor's office saying, "I think I need a new challenge."

**There are many areas where a backup administrator can bring value to an organization beyond being the keeper of the data.**

On the other hand, the role of a backup administrator should be one of administration, not operation. [Backup environments](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/podcast/Data-encryption-solutions-for-your-backup-environment) present many challenges that are often overlooked simply because we are too focused on operations. There are many areas where a backup administrator can bring value to an organization beyond being the keeper of the data.

**Storage growth, backup retention and restore requests**

We all typically rely on management to decide how long backups should be retained. Because there has traditionally been a certain disconnect between IT and the business, [backup retention policies](http://www.it.iastate.edu/policies/backups) are rarely challenged. This usually leads to more [storage capacity](http://searchstorage.techtarget.com/definition/storage-capacity-planning) requirements and, eventually, painful [recovery times](http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/recovery-time-objective-RTO) when a full restore is required.This presents a great opportunity for a backup administrator to show some thought leadership. By tracking details regarding daily restore requests from end users, you can quickly accumulate statistics showing what end users typically want restored. If the majority of restores are for files from backups that are two or three days old, this may represent a great opportunity to shorten some of the backup retention, free up some storage and reduce media cost.

**Backup performance and configuration**

Your [backup reporting tools](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/tip/Why-you-need-a-data-backup-reporting-tool) faithfully report on the successes and failures of your backups. There lies an opportunity to do some root-cause analysis and improve the perceived reliability of backups. Certain objects will fail to back up on a regular basis because they are locked or changing during the backup. Many administrators know about these instances and quickly learn to ignore the usual suspects because they know these objects will always fail to backup. The cause for [backup failures](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/tip/Data-backup-failure-Five-tips-for-prevention) should be documented and the objects should probably be excluded from the backups once it has been established that they are not critical. The end result is a much cleaner backup log that is always sure to please any auditor.There is also the possibility that some backups will complete faster. Certain [backup software](http://searchdatabackup.techtarget.com/news/2240181961/Analyzing-recent-developments-in-the-backup-software-market) will retry failed objects multiple times before giving up and reporting an error. This can eventually increase backup duration if there are numerous failures on multiple servers.

**What is backed up?**

Another opportunity to show your true worth as a data protection specialist is to know what gets backed up on a regular basis and most importantly, what is not backed up. Excluding files that do not need backups can save a lot of storage and shrink backup windows; two items that have a positive impact on your backup environment and your career.

However, it is a little more difficult and time consuming to go around the various systems and ensure that everything that should be backed actually is. That said, catching files that had been mistakenly excluded from backups is always a very positive item to report and can be priceless in time of need.

**Capacity planning**

The benefits of [capacity planning](http://www.computerweekly.com/feature/Storage-capacity-planning-tools-Why-virtual-machines-change-everything) should never be underestimated. Many backup administrators get caught scrambling for space at the last minute because they did not take the time to keep track of increased demand on backup storage capacity. Requesting to be involved in change management meetings and various systems deployment projects will demonstrate a desire to be proactive about capacity planning. Gathering historical storage growth information to produce growth trend analysis graphics is a simple yet very effective way to get your point across to management when planning to purchase more storage. It also shows that you are on top of your game.

**Industry trends and new technologies**

Keeping up with industry trends and developing data backup technologies is a good way to improve your technical skills and the value you bring to your organization. Learning about new storage technologies will help you address growing problems in your environment, again showing thought leadership and putting you in a position to ask vendors the right questions when looking at new solutions. A broad knowledge base will always be valued by management who rely on you for technical expertise.

**Reduced cost and improved recoverability**

There are definitely many technical areas where backup administrators can improve backups and their own visibility within their company. However, the most effective way to a better career path with most business entities is fairly straightforward and can be summarized as a few success factors such as contributing to increased profits, reducing operational costs and improving quality of service. Backup administrators can definitely contribute to two of those aspects in a positive manner.

*About the author: Pierre Dorion is the Data Center Practice Director and a Senior Consultant with*[*Long View Systems Inc.*](http://www.longviewsystems.com/)*in Phoenix, AZ, specializing in the areas of business continuity and disaster recovery planning services, and corporate data protection.*