

VARs help tame customers' data recovery pain

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Data recovery is never a good customer experience.

Typically, the death of a hard drive brings a customer to a VAR's door, hoping against hope that something might be preserved.

Resellers and solutions providers usually have a go at salvaging the data, but they refer the most difficult cases to a data recovery specialist -- the channel's court of last resort for defunct or badly damaged drives.

A number of data recovery specialists offer partner programs. The list includes CBL Data Recovery Technologies, DriveSavers Data Recovery, Kroll Ontrack, and SalvageData Recovery System. Those vendors will hunt down what data they can for a price, and fees can run as high as thousands of dollars for the largest and most complicated recovery tasks. Factors for pricing a job include storage device type, capacity, complexity and how quickly a customer needs to have the data back.

Data recovery specialists backstop VARs

The loss of data -- and the expense of retrieving it -- makes for a painful customer experience, but channel partners can soften the blow by handling drive shipping chores and doing a bit of hand-holding. They can also take the opportunity to gently remind customers of the importance of backup and sell them solutions for the job.

"We try to make it as easy as possible for the customers," said Norman Riker, director of business development at [CompuTech Support Services](#), an Apple authorized service provider in Los Angeles.

CompuTech attempts to recover a customer's data using its own recovery process. If that doesn't work, which is usually because of a mechanical failure, the company packs up the drive and ships it overnight to DriveSavers, if the customer agrees to do so, Riker said.

The company also sends a target drive, to which DriveSavers migrates any recovered data. If the customer's computer is under warranty, CompuTech will obtain a replacement drive from Apple. If not, it will sell third-party drives. When the target drive returns from DriveSavers, CompuTech migrates the data to the customer's new drive. It will also work on reorganizing the customer's recovered data, if the salvage process results in scrambled files.

"This makes it as painless as possible, although the pocketbook still hurts," Riker said.

Similarly, [StarSurplus.com](#) offers its own data recovery service. But in cases of catastrophic failure, and upon customer request, the company sends the drive to Knoll Ontrack, said Brian Flynn, owner of the Murietta, Calif.-based computer and electronics retailer.

Flynn estimated that his company sends up to seven jobs a month to Knoll Ontrack.

Data recovery is also on the menu of services at [macVolks Inc.](#), an Apple authorized service provider and consultancy in Concord, Calif.

"We have an excellent rate of success with the equipment we have," said Sharman Gordon-Corleto, chief executive officer at macVolks.

The company is able to coax data out of roughly two-thirds of the ailing drives that come its way, relying on its own software, hardware and expertise. The other third goes to DriveSavers. Gordon-Corleto said she has been pleased with DriveSavers' recovery rate and high levels of customer service and has worked with the company since 1990.

When macVolks ships a drive to DriveSavers, it also includes a target drive. The customer or, more typically, macVolks supplies that device. When the drive and the recovered data arrive back at the shop, macVolks sets up the replacement drive, moves stray data to the appropriate directories as necessary, and returns the computer to the customer as a finished product, Gordon-Corleto explained. If a customer has an IT department, macVolks will coordinate the restoration project with the in-house staff, she added.

Data recovery vendors reward channel partners for the business they pass along.

Authorized DriveSavers resellers, for instance, can offer their customers a 10% discount on DriveSavers' data recovery services, a company spokeswoman said. The reseller, in return, receives a 10% commission on every successful data recovery referral, she added.

Resellers who send jobs to Kroll's Ontrack data recovery shop get a 10% referral fee, noted Ken Gibson, Ontrack Data Recovery partnership channel manager. Kroll Ontrack also gives resellers a discount on its services, with the reseller determining how the discount is applied to the end customer.

Data recovery leads to backup business

Data recovery is a reactive service. People come to resellers and retailers when they get in trouble. Yet, the biggest opportunity lies in proactive selling. Channel partners say they take the occasion of a failed drive to discuss backup strategies with customers.

"After the trauma is over and we've walked them through what it will entail to get their data up and running, we talk about backup solutions," Riker said. "The experience is a perfect opportunity to discuss backup processes with the customer."

The good news for VARs is that any customer that has suffered the stress of data recovery is a motivated buyer for backup. The backup system may be as simple as an external drive, Flynn said. Installing a slave drive in the customer's computer is another option. And some customers may even need tape backup.

CompuTech will sell an external backup drive to customers and enable Apple's Time Machine backup software. Riker said it also provides an alternative backup solution for Apple machines running pre-Leopard operating systems that lack Time Machine. For businesses, CompuTech offers a remote monitoring service that keeps tabs on backups and periodically determines whether they have succeeded.

Gordon-Corleto strongly advises customers to adopt a backup strategy to avoid the high price of recovery. And, customers should consider approaches for both production and archival data. For example, a Mac equipped with Time Machine and an external drive provides some protection, but it's not a complete solution, she said. That approach works for day-to-day backup, but customers need an additional layer for recovering years-old data.

She said graphics industry customers, in particular, have large files to keep active, but not necessarily on production computers using Time Machine. Depending on the situation, macVolks has recommended network-attached storage, mirrored servers or cloud storage to supplement local backup. It's less important which methodology is chosen, but rather that the data is redundant and secure, she added.

Resellers have backup solutions at the ready for customers eager for an ounce of data loss prevention. And for customers willing to risk a potentially expensive pound of cure, data recovery services are standing by.