Opinion Piece: Data management 101 – what's the difference between backup and archiving?
By Chris de Bruyn, Operations Manager at Gabsten Technologies

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No business today, irrespective of size, can survive for long without access to their data. In the event of a disaster, a malware attack or even accidental loss of data, it is of the utmost importance to be able to recover quickly and get back to business as usual. For small businesses, data management consists of backup and archiving – two practices that are often confused with each other. However, these are two different things, and understanding the difference is key.

So, what is the difference?
Backup is simply a secondary copy of your data, or even a third copy of mission critical data in larger businesses. It is used to restore active data in the event of any data loss event and needs to be easily accessible but kept at a separate location to primary storage. Archiving, on the other hand, is something that only takes place after backup has been completed and involves moving backup data that is no longer active into less expensive storage.

The decision of when to archive data depends on the nature of the business, however, archiving is an important part of data management. When certain information, such as patient records in a medical practice or tax records for any business, needs to be retained for a number of years, archiving is a far more cost-effective solution than keeping everything in the primary storage tier.

Why data management?
Backup and archiving are essential tools for any business, however, a manual process introduces the significant risk of human error. Automated solutions for data management will ensure that backups take place at regular intervals across all devices, and that data is archived according to company policy without the need for human intervention. Data management solutions can help to ensure the optimal mix of storage media is utilised, including cloud offerings for archive information, to help small businesses optimise data storage costs.

Data management also ensures that backups are completed correctly and that nothing goes wrong in the archiving process. For example, it is not possible to archive data that has not been backed up. In addition, a backup and archiving strategy that is not compliant or effective may cause failures that can impact a business' ability to recover from a disaster.

Specialised data management solutions offered as a service, manage backups and ensure that they are stored securely at an offsite location and then automatically apply archive policies. This ensures that data is physically protected in the event of a break in – because laptops and hard drives are often the most common targets of theft. It also ensures that data is always backed up without requiring people to do this process manually and removes the need to have an IT person within the organisation responsible for this.

When a disaster happens it's already too late
Many small businesses see backups and archiving as grudge purchases and do not realise the value of data management until a disaster occurs. By that stage it is already too late, and data is lost forever. Data management not only automates this to ensure that data can be recovered, it also adds value by ensuring that data is always available when it is needed. Automated solutions allow small businesses to focus on their core business, safe in the knowledge that their data is protected from disaster and they can recover with minimal disruption should anything happen.