

Episode 12: Technology and Sound Bytes – Cloud Storage

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This is a transcript of Nancy Bacon, Sarah Brooks, and JoAnn Crabtree talking about cloud storage and why nonprofit leaders should prioritize the security of their key documents. You can listen [here](#) or however you prefer to listen to podcasts.

Nancy Bacon

Hello, and welcome to the Nonprofit Radio Show -- a podcast with tips and tools for small nonprofits. If you feel in the dark about how to run a nonprofit sunshine is on its way. I'm Nancy Bacon, and I'm joined by Sarah Brooks and JoAnn Crabtree, and this week, we're talking about technology.

You know what, right before we started recording, Sarah lost her internet. She froze like a image out of a Star Wars movie. And then we had to figure out how to proceed. What do you think about that?

Yep, you gotta love technology. You know, technology is one of those things. For a lot of nonprofits, it's a really big word. It's so complicated, we're not sure how to begin. And our thought is that we invest every day in our organizations, and we also have to invest in those things that allow us to achieve our mission. And technology is a really important part of that. There's a whole lot to talk about when it comes to technology. So today, we've chosen one specific topic because it relates to what a lot of nonprofits are dealing with getting ready for disasters or coming out of disasters, we're going to be talking about Cloud Storage.

Sarah Brooks

And this is so important, I can speak from firsthand experience. My community faced very significant fires in 2014-15. And we were told to evacuate our office. And I can assure you that we were not prepared for what that would mean. And the only thing that kept us feeling confident was that we knew our information, our QuickBooks, our databases, all that information on our mission work for conservation were backed up in the cloud. So, if everything went really, really haywire, at least we'd have a way to rebuild our work and our mission.

Nancy

So it sounds like before that incident, your organization had played that game of I have 15 minutes before I'm going off to a desert island. What am I going to bring with me? Have you played that?

Sarah

Well, only insofar as we had a smart staff person who thought you know what, we should be backing things up to the cloud, and they made sure that was happening. We've learned since then a whole lot more about what we could be doing to make sure we're really prepared. And I'm excited to hear from JoAnn today so that all of you can understand some of the things you need to do to be ready.

Nancy

Very cool. Well, so let's dig in. What are we even talking about? JoAnn, what is cloud storage?

JoAnn Crabtree

Cloud storage is a computing model that allows you to store data on the internet. It's your provider who manages and operates data storage as a service. That storage allows you to access infrastructure that you rent or lease, instead of purchasing outright. Cloud Storage resides on servers and data centers. In the past, if you wanted to share your files in electronic form with others in your organization, you either had to have your own servers, or copy that information to a portable device, such as a thumb drive. And portable devices make it really hard to control document versions, when those files reside in multiple places, as well as their potential for loss or damage. Three large cloud storage service providers are Dropbox, Google Drive, and Microsoft OneDrive. Cloud Storage is a way for you to easily access all of your files from all of your devices, no matter where you are located.

Nancy

So, I'm picturing like big file cabinets up in the clouds that we all have access to. Is that what we're talking about here?

JoAnn

Well, you have access to those that you have credentials to log into. And that's another thing that's wonderful.

Sarah

I think we're relying on these now more than ever, not just for backup in case of a disaster or a loss at our offices, but also now that we're working remotely, it's a great way to make sure we're actually able to communicate.

JoAnn

Yes, indeed, that's very important.

Nancy

I, you know, I think not only are there security issues, but so many nonprofits work in such great collaborations that it allows various people to have access to that. So, JoAnn, my data and documents are on my hard drive, I have a copy on my thumb drive, I actually have an external hard drive. I've got all that and my laptop is brand new. Why do I need cloud storage?

JoAnn

Well, Sarah already talked about natural disasters. It's important for us to consider, what would we do if we have 15 minutes or no time at all, to take what we need to stay in business. In addition to natural disasters, you have equipment failure, there's theft, or even loss. So you want to make sure that your data is in a place that it will protect your organization, your staff's jobs, the communities you serve, and your mission.

Sarah

And I can say with absolute certainty that in that moment when you're asked to leave your space quickly, the last thing on your mind is, how am I going to get all the right files and put them in that external hard drive or on my thumb drive, you literally feel frozen. It's like I don't even know what I should say. And so the fact that it is automatic, that a cloud storage can happen every night or every week or just on a regular schedule, means that in those moments of panic, you're not relying on your own ability to remember what's important for your organization.

JoAnn

And it takes a lot of time to compile that data into one place to take with you. So, if you lost your data and your documents right now, do you have what you need to recreate all of it? If you have printed documents that you plan to rebuild with, what if they were compromised? And even if you have those hard copies of your documents, and your data survived? Do you have the time and the resources to recreate all of it, your contacts, your financial documents, income expenses, contracts, bylaws, programming documents, everything? What would happen to your organization, your staff, your community, and your mission?

Nancy

Wow, we often start with "why..." why this really matters, and you just drove it home, I cannot imagine the nonprofit's I work with and what it would take to completely recreate those organizations from scratch in terms of all their paperwork, finances, all of that.

JoAnn

So, Nancy, you mentioned you have a new computer. Well, interestingly enough, 29% of hard drive failures are caused by accidents. Sometimes it's as simple as spilling your tea on your keyboard. 58% of small businesses are not prepared for data loss. And according to Washington, DC, research firm Clutch, 60% of small businesses that lose their data, they'll shut down within six months.

Sarah

We can't let that happen.

Nancy

I find those numbers frightening. They are frightening. They are frightening, you know, nonprofits, we don't think this way. But we are in some ways, small businesses. And so, thinking about all these statistics related to small businesses, in terms of how they relate to us is really important. I think it's very grounding. So you've convinced me JoAnn, I get it, I want to do this cloud storage thing. What do I do? What do I look for?

JoAnn

Features you'll want to look for are mirroring cloud storage providers that store that same file in multiple locations on different servers, often 10 to 15 different locations around the world. So, if anything happens to the servers in that one location, your data and your files are safe at another location. Syncing...will your files automatically sync with your cloud storage? So the changes you make on your local device, your laptop, for example, will automatically be reflected in those same documents on the cloud document recovery. What about the files that have been deleted intentionally or unintentionally, and now you need them? How long does your service hold those files, so that you can undelete them or restore them if you need to? That is super important also.

Nancy

So in a previous job, we had Dropbox and a whole lot of people had access to it. And all of a sudden, I was looking at my Dropbox and a whole set of key files started to disappear, like really important files, and I was like, oh, my everything important is going away. And it turned out that one of the users was cleaning off her computer. And she was deleting all of these files from her computer, not understanding that she was deleting them for all of us. So rather than deleting them, she should have just been taken off of them. And so luckily, we were able to recover all of those files.

JoAnn

I'm so glad you mentioned that, Nancy, because one other thing that's really important is even if you do have everything on cloud storage, you need to make sure that the people who need access to the files have access but those that don't, don't. So, be intentional in who gets to see what. I'm going to use Dropbox as an example here, this isn't an endorsement, just an example. You'll need to purchase at least two licenses, one for your ED, and one for at least one other person from the organization. If you don't have paid staff, for the second person consider a board member. And the second license might be for board chair at your nonprofit. Purchase two licenses, and they see all of the files. But now your board also needs files, right? You're putting all of those documents out there that you don't want to have to spend time on in your board meeting. So, they're in a folder called board documents. And your board can only see those the way they gain access without you needing to buy 12 licenses for this if they probably just have free Dropbox accounts, and you grant them access to only that one folder, the board documents and they have everything they need. And still you've protected your information. And finally, be sure to select strong passwords. We'll talk more about passwords in another episode.

Sarah

That reminds me of how we manage our bank accounts. I think we're all pretty used to having different signers on different banking accounts, for some bank accounts you want multiple people to be able to have access to and maybe you've got an extra special savings account that only a handful of people have direct access to. So, we do this we know how to do this. And now we just need to learn how to do it in the cloud.

Nancy:

Exactly. I know a lot of our listeners are very small nonprofits, and they have minimal money to spend on anything that isn't directly achieving their mission. And I'm just thinking what they're

probably thinking right now. And that is, this all sounds great. But I truly don't have the funds to do this, that I need to spend all of my money on our programs.

Sarah

Well, JoAnn, correct me if I'm wrong, but we're not talking about a lot of money here, are we?

JoAnn

No, we're not especially for a small nonprofit.

Sarah

Right, and it seems to me that this is a part of performing your mission, because you literally won't be able to do anything for weeks, or even months, if you lose all your information. So, if you truly have no resources for this, this, in my mind is a perfect opportunity to go to a donor with a very specific ask. Hey, would you support us with two or \$300 this year that will allow us to backup all of our information on a regular basis so that we can guarantee we'll be able to continue to provide that important mission in our community. It's a perfect, wonderful, specific donor ask, that's waiting for you to make.

Nancy

I love that. And really, what you're saying is investing in your organization is part of delivering your mission. And so, it really does need to happen under that guise of doing what you need to do to achieve what you need to do.

JoAnn

Absolutely. So, other things that you'll want to look for are ease of use. We talked a little bit about security. Make sure that people who need the files can have access to them, but those that don't, don't. So, when people leave, you need to make sure that they no longer have access to your files. Technical support, do you have technical support? And that's one reason for purchasing a license for Cloud Storage. Frequently, you can get things for free, but they

probably don't come with technical support. And how much does lost time cost you in the end? A lot? Yes, indeed. And finally, of course, cost is always an issue. Take a look, because cheapest is not necessarily going to be best. Look at your needs before you decide what it is that you choose.

Sarah

You know, JoAnn, I'm thinking about in my organization, we at the moment don't have someone who considers themselves a tech expert. But when I think about the broader support of our organization, I absolutely know two or three people who we could go to, to ask, Hey, would you help us just look through this and maybe even set up the basic infrastructure for us, so that we can do this really important thing for our mission. And I think there are a ton of people in all of your organizations who would be willing to sit down for an hour or two with you and show you, here's how you can easily make this work. And look, it's all set up. Now, just use it.

JoAnn

I love that. And as a nonprofit, always remember to ask if your vendor offers nonprofit discounts, because frequently they do.

Sarah

Well, thank you, JoAnn, for sharing all your insight on cloud storage, I've learned a lot. And hopefully our listeners are starting to feel a little more excited about cloud storage and backing up your data, because it is an important part of making your mission happen forever. You've done some really important things for our listeners. First of all, you've introduced us to the need and the why. I hope we all understand now how important it is to make sure that this basic function of your organization endures forever. You've also helped us to see we can keep it simple-- that's really important to your small nonprofit. Keep it simple, but still feel assured. And you've reminded us that it's important to just get started. Do something in the next week to back-up your information. Even if it's as simple as putting it on a thumb drive and taking that

thumb drive off-site. It's a start and make a plan to get there to the full cloud storage backup your mission deserves. You've totally got this.

JoAnn

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