Transcript: Spring Break Prep, March 18, 2009

Mary: Hello, my name is Mary, and I am a member of the NUIT Communications team, and welcome to the latest NUIT to Go podcast. Today I have Matt Kelsey, Distributed Support Specialist here at NUIT, to tell us a few things we need to do before leaving campus for Spring Break or any other extended vacation that you might have planned. Welcome Matt, thanks for joining us.

Matt: I’m very excited to be here.

Mary: OK, so let’s get started. What is the most important thing I need to do before leaving campus?

Matt: Well, the most important thing you should do, and really this holds true throughout the year, is to keep a backup of your computer data. And I think everyone knows you should do it, but very few people actually do do it. So let me just tell you about a couple of methods that you can use to backup your computer business and then your business computer very easily. So for your personal computer, there are two good options for this. The first one is using an online backup service, and there are plenty of them out there. You can Google the terms and see what comes up. And what these websites do is, you download a small program onto your computer, and that program will scan your hard drive and upload your files to the remote server, which is located in a data center somewhere in the country, and they’re really very easy and quite reasonably priced; it’s usually between five to ten dollars a month for unlimited backup, so it’s a good way to secure your family photos, you know, your videos, your MP3’s. The first backup is going to take a little bit of time, especially if you have a lot of data, but on subsequent runs it just does a differential, so it just sees what files have changed and uploads those. Another good solution is to buy an external hard drive, like from Western Digital or SeaGate, and a lot of times these external hard drives come with backup software that you can install on your computer, and that also will backup your data. With the external hard drives, what you want to be careful about is actually physically securing that hard drive like in a locked drawer or something, especially if you’re going off on some sort of fun trip for Spring Break, because if someone breaks into your office or your home and steals your computer and your hard drive is right there as well, well, you’ve just lost all of your data. So the important thing is that you want to physically secure that.

Mary: OK.

Matt: And then for business computers, Northwestern recommends Iron Mountain’s Connected Backup service; that’s what we use here at Technology and Support Services. That is also an online backup service. Iron Mountain, I guess, they originally started to protect against nuclear strikes. They actually had a limestone mountain somewhere in New York I think. So banks would store their records there, and they branched out into data
services. I’m not sure if your data is actually going to go into an iron mountain, but once again some sort of data center out in the country. You can talk to your IT support person for more information including pricing. So once again, you just want to remember to definitely take a backup of your computer before you leave and continue to do that throughout the year.

Mary: OK. What else do I need to do?

Matt: OK, one thing we really want to recommend is that you disconnect your computer and electronic equipment to be green and save energy. Every year in the US, five gigawatts are lost to what we call “leaking electricity”, which is when you leave your cell phone charger plugged in or your computer, and it pulls just a little bit of electricity. So that five gigawatts is the equivalent of five standard power plants, going full-time throughout the year, just so that you can leave your equipment plugged in, so it really is incredibly wasteful.

Mary: That phantom power will get you.

Matt: Exactly, so really, unplug your computer, unplug any other appliances that you’re not going to use, and also, you know, even though there’s only a small risk of fire hazards and that kind of thing, will minimize that risk as well.

Mary: OK, well what do I need to do when I return to campus?

Matt: Well the first thing you should do definitely is update your antivirus and anti-spyware definitions, so you can do that with Northwestern’s Symantec Antivirus client by double-clicking in the yellow shield icon in the bottom-right hand corner of your computer if you’re on a PC, and then running the LiveUpdate program, because when you come back, your antivirus definitions will be a week out of date, and new viruses are coming out every day, so it’s very important to maintain your protection. So definitely do that.

Mary: OK. Anything else?

Matt: You should also change your password. It’s a good thing to change your password periodically. A lot of times, if someone cracks your password, they won’t change it; they’ll keep it so that they can continue to access your account and you won’t necessarily know that anything’s amiss. So you want to change your password periodically, and you can do that by going to snap.it.northwestern.edu and clicking on the “Change your Password” link. Some other good tips, it’s good not to make all of your passwords the same, you know, like you have your online banking services, your e-mail, your Facebook, maybe you signed up for online discussion groups or forums, really you want to keep different passwords.

Mary: Yeah, I have my “important password”, I call it, for my bank and other important services, and then for other “junk services” that I subscribe to, I have the easy password that I hope no one will crack.
**Matt:** Yeah, exactly. So that’s a very good strategy, and there are documented cases before of, for example, forum operators, someone signs up with their Gmail account and they use their Gmail password, and the forum operator just took that, logged into their Gmail account, and saw all of their correspondents, and I think it was a politically-motivated case in that incident, but definitely a very real threat and something you should be aware of.

**Mary:** Alright, well I will definitely change that password, and we hope you all do too. I think that’s all the time we have for today. I want to thank you Matt for joining us.

**Matt:** You’re very welcome.

**Mary:** And everyone, have a great trip!

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