

Pigeons and Computer Backups

by
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While Internet usage continues to grow, wide area networks and intranets are beginning to spring up throughout the valley. Area companies must employ these new technologies to compete in today's international marketplace. At Apollo Trust Company, we try our best to keep pace. A system that might be the most advanced in Armstrong County today could be ancient history tomorrow if we don't keep our eye on the moving target.

As the Kiski Valley's only remaining independent bank, we have to be able to move information quickly in order to compete with the large banks from Pittsburgh and Indiana. Check images from one branch race to another branch in microseconds to provide customers with the best in operational efficiency and service. ISDN lines and fiber optics move information from our bank in providing free unlimited access for the Apollo-Ridge and Leechburg School Districts.

One of the most important components in this computerized age is tape backups. Banks for example have to keep detailed records of everything. We must produce copies for regulators, government officials, courts and customers. Obviously, tape backups are one of the Federal Reserve's most stringent requirements. Not only must a bank backup everything (sometimes in duplicate), they are also required to move all backups off site. This imposes a hardship because a courier can be very costly.

So how does a high tech bank like Apollo Trust Company move its tape backups from one site to another in the most cost-efficient manner. The answer may surprise you.

A year ago, I watched a friend training homing pigeons. He called them "harriers" because he trained them to fly straight up, reach a high altitude, fly over a few acres to a feed station and then descend straight down. By training his pigeons to fly straight up and then straight down, he avoided his birds from being shot at.

As soon as I witnessed this incredible feat, an idea occurred to me. "Bill, how much weight can a pigeon carry around its neck," I asked hurriedly. "A pigeon cannot carry anything around its neck," he laughed. "You have to tie it around its leg. I would guess maybe one ounce, not much more," he continued. "I'll be right back," I gushed.

I ran out to my car and found a miniature DAT tape that I had off site en route to one of our branches. I raced back to the birds. "Here, Bill! Tie this to one of your birds. I want to see if he can make it to the feed station with this around his feet," I blurted in anticipation.

Sure enough, Bill's harrier took off and carried the tape to the feed station. "I can't believe this Bill. It's great. Can these birds fly five miles," I asked. "No problem," Bill replied.

For \$500, I bought five harriers. I set up feed stations on the roofs at each of our branches and I tagged our blue logo on the wings of each bird so they would be returned if something unfortunate occurred.

For the following two months Bill taught each bird to go to one branch, feed and then return back to it's own home branch. Branch managers were schooled in how to take care of their branch pigeon. They even gave them names.

After a couple months, the experiment began. All five birds had a backup tape tied to its leg. Each morning they flew to their designated branch like clockwork and then hopped to their feed stations. The branch manager would meet the bird, untie the tape and send it back on it's merry way with a new tape attached. Remarkably, harriers are dependable in rain, sleet and snow.

This system has worked so well that many small companies having offices within a 20 mile radius of their headquarters have begun calling Bill. We bought two more harriers and keep them in reserve. As you might expect these harriers have become hot selling items. It is no surprise that Bill has not been able to keep up with the demand.

Now if I could only train my dogs to answer the phone.



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