

Catastrophic Backup Failure At Microsoft Data Centre

By David Richards and Computer Daily News | Monday | 12/10/2009

Days after launching their new Windows Mobile 6.5 Operating System which lets users back up the content of their Smartphone to an external server or cloud computing environment, the Company has witnessed a massive data failure at their Danger subsidiary, resulting in thousands of smartphones being wiped of contacts and data. This is the same data service offered by Telstra who sell the service under the "Hiptop" brand name.

The massive data failure threatens to put a dark cloud over the company's broader "software plus services" strategy. It will also cast a shadow over the booming field of cloud-computing generally.

The Danger unit experienced a huge outage that left many users of a gadget called the Sidekick which is sold as a teenagers' Blackberry without access to their calendar, address book, and other key data. That's because Sidekick keeps nearly all its data in the cloud, as opposed to customers' keeping the primary copy on the devices themselves.

Microsoft warned over the weekend that data so far not recovered may be permanently lost. Said a note to users, in part:

"Dear valued Sidekick customers: T-Mobile and the Sidekick data services provider, Danger, a subsidiary of Microsoft, are reaching out to express our apologies regarding the recent Sidekick data service disruption.

"Regrettably, based on Microsoft/Danger's latest recovery assessment of their systems, we must now inform you that personal information stored on your device such as contacts, calendar entries, to-do lists or photos that is no longer on your Sidekick almost certainly has been lost as a result of a server failure at Microsoft/Danger. That said, our teams continue to work around-the-clock in hopes of discovering some way to recover this information. However, the likelihood of a successful outcome is extremely low."

It's not immediately clear how many customers lost their data. The outage affected a broad swath of Sidekick users, though many had data return during the week.

While outages in the cloud computing world are common, data losses are another story. And this one stands as one of the more stunning ones in recent memory.

The Danger outage comes just a month before Microsoft is expected to launch its operating system in the cloud Windows Azure. One of the characteristics of Azure is that programs written for it can be run only via Microsoft's data centres and not on a company's own servers.

The Azure setup is different from the one Danger uses: Sidekick uses an architecture Microsoft inherited rather than built (Microsoft bought Danger last year). Still, the failure is enough to give any CIO pause.

The Sidekick has been marketed in Australia by Telstra under the sobriquet Hiptop. It wasn't known last night whether any Australian users were affected.

*Source: <http://www.smarthouse.com.au/Phones/Industry/V6U5D8C3?page=1>