
Where were you when the lights went out?

Summertime, the weather can change in a moment's notice. Likewise, the high heat and humidity can quickly generate an electrical storm on par with the town's July 4th fireworks celebration. The fireworks put on by Fair Lawn's municipality and New York's Macy*s show may not compare, but if a bolt of lightning should select your power grid while you are editing a critical, yet unsaved document, what likelihood does it have of being rewritten? Worse yet, what if we were to have another August 14th power outage!

The answer to that question depends on your ability to anticipate the inevitable. How many times have you been in your home or office when the lights have either flickered or gone out completely due to a power issue? If you can answer "never" to this question, then either you work in a location with redundant power or your memory may be failing you. The truth is that most people will experience this situation at least once every year or two. The objective here is to determine a strategy that will allow your electronics and computers to withstand the inconsistencies in power.

During my tenure at a Fortune 100 company, one of the regular tasks was to assure the reliability of the UPS systems. **UPS** (not "United Parcel Service") is the acronym used for "Uninterruptible Power Supply." A simplified description of a UPS is a battery enhanced power strip. The process is simple, power from your wall outlet trickles into the battery and the computer runs off of the power from the battery. The result is an even and consistent flow of electricity that has the ability to continue even if the AC power from the wall outlet stops completely. Read on, then reassess your power strip.

Can the UPS allow me to work indefinitely in the event of a power outage? No, the UPS should not be mistaken for a power generator. The UPS works by allowing your system to communicate with it via a serial or USB cable and software that polls the device for any discrepancies in power. In most cases, the UPS will provide power for up to 18 minutes (depending upon the model and load). Its value is to allow the computer attached to it to experience a graceful shutdown. The software provided with the device often allows for a graceful automatic unattended shutdown, too! Imagine that you have left your office and the computer was still running; the power in the neighborhood goes out. Will your database become corrupted or will the system close itself and allow you to reboot at a later time to a functional program?

The UPS is like insurance: You may never actually need it for its full potential, but the peace of mind that it provides is of tremendous value. Should you have one for your server?...Definitely. Should you have one for your workstation?...More than likely. Do you need one for your inkjet printer...Probably not. Do you need one for your router and networking equipment?...That depends on how critical it is to your business.

Now that you know what a UPS is and how it may play a vital part in your computer system's "life", you need to know which one to order. UPS come in many capacities—350VA, 500VA, 725VA, 1000VA etc. I have found that although you may be

able to guess your requirement, it can be made easy by visiting the website of one of the more popular manufacturers: APC (American Power Conversion)—www.apc.com. Go to the SELECTORS page and you will be prompted through the process for workstations through Infrastructure support systems (<http://www.apc.com/template/size/apc/index.cfm>). It doesn't matter whether you use a PC, Macintosh, UNIX based system or a home theatre/stereo system. The program will help you determine which capacity you need and, of course, which of their products will most ably fill your need.

I have had satisfactory results with APC products. Other reputable manufacturers of UPS include TrippLite, Liebert, and Belkin. These companies make UPS for the small business-scale. If you require greater capacity, then the selection may vary somewhat.

Terrific! You've purchased the UPS and attached it to your system. You have not installed the software. Will the system automatically shut itself down without your intervention? On the newer operating systems (O/S) like Windows XP, the O/S may automatically detect the connection to a UPS (remember plug and play?). To configure the UPS with WinXP, go to the Control Panel/Power Options and click on the UPS tab. Once you have selected your manufacturer and device and applied the settings, you may then configure the response that you want from your computer system.

You may select how you want to be notified and how you want the system to behave in the event of an outage.

If you choose to use the software distributed with the device, it may disable this feature in the O/S in order to maintain exclusive control. The software makes the configuration easy and straightforward.

The critical issue is that you spend an ounce on the prevention to avoid a pound on the cure. UPS may be purchased at most retailers that also carry computers. If you order online, be aware that the batteries are heavy and may cost extra for shipping. If you are interested in learning more about the items discussed above, feel free to contact Holzager Technology Services, Inc. at (201) 797-5050 or by e-mail at info@tech4now.com. For general information about other services for your home or office, kindly visit www.tech4now.com, there you may retrieve additional information bulletins and articles to help you use technology to your fullest advantage.

