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# MASO Journal

THE AWARD WINNING

Middle Atlantic Society of Orthodontists

Autumn 2008

2008 Annual Session Program  
Clinical Pearls  
Research Abstracts  
Practice Management



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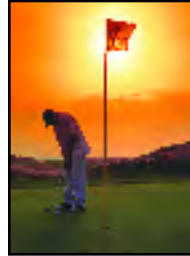
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**JUMP INTO PARADISE!**



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## Computer System Security and Backup Procedures: Tips and Guidelines

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**Today's orthodontic practices** are well aware that computer system security and backup procedures play key roles in HIPAA compliance. While no practice management software provides HIPAA compliance by itself, a good system will make it easy for you and your staff to comply with privacy and security standards - assuming that everyone follows appropriate procedures, of course!

The following tips and guidelines address many of the common questions regarding practice management system security and backup procedures.

### Security

No security system is absolutely foolproof. However, multiple layers of security will prevent any casual attempt at unauthorized access.

**Logins and passwords.** Each employee must have a unique private login name and password. From there, a good practice management software package should allow you to set up access permissions specific to each employee's job function both by area - such as accounts and scheduling, vs. scheduling only - and by level, e.g., no access, read-only access (no changes), or read-write access (changes allowed).

Here's just one reason this unique access is so important. If your software program processes automatic payments, you will be storing bank and credit card information, and only certain employees should be able to access this information. Of these employees, some may be permitted to access the ledger but not add new transactions. Others may be permitted to add transactions (charges/payments) but not make adjustments without a password. The same applies to scheduling, treatment cards, or any other program component.

Your system should have a "hot key" that locks down the system when an employee leaves their station. For instance, an employee might press the F12 key as they leave. The next employee to access that station must then use his or her own login to gain access to the system.

You should also set your screensaver to allow login/password access only.

As for the logins and passwords themselves, here are a few guidelines:

- use a minimum of eight characters
- mix numbers and letters (don't use all numbers or all letters)
- never use common words, birthdates, names, etc.
- do not allow employees to store passwords on sticky notes beneath keyboards, in wallets, etc.
- do not use the same combination for both the login and password
- change logins and passwords frequently

**Physical location of data.** If your server is located in a closet, or better yet, behind a locked door, it is far safer than at the front desk. If a break-in occurs, a thief is more likely to grab visible, easily accessible computers versus one they can't see. When/if you take a backup or system off premises, do not under any circumstances leave it in your car or otherwise unattended. All backup files should be password protected.

**Other considerations.** The type of database your software package uses to store information is important. Some are more easily hacked than others. Ask for detailed information from your

software package provider.

Every server should have a firewall in place. With several layers of security in place - a solid firewall, Windows passwords, and additional passwords for your practice management software - you have the equivalent of a brick wall versus a picket fence around your sensitive data. Most hackers will pass by your "brick wall" in favor of easier prey.

### Backups

No matter what kind of backup system you choose for your practice, always do a complete backup and not an "incremental" backup. Incremental backups only back up files that were changed since the last backup. What if you needed to restore? With incremental backups, you would have to start with the original backup and restore each backup to the present. This is never a good idea.

For those working with older operating systems, a good procedure is to close all applications on each workstation when leaving for the day and before a backup is done. Why? Because on older systems, backups will skip over any open files. This is not an issue with MS 2003 Server or XP Pro.

Next, find out if your software utilizes "internal" backups. If not, you need to determine "what" you need to back up. How big is it? Certain backup methods may be better than others, depending on your particular variables.

**Backup methods.** My top recommendation and personal preference for backups is to use a professional offsite backup company that will do your backups for you automatically. (For one example, see *Subterranean Data Services*, <http://www.trueevaulting.com>.)

With offsite backup companies, you have true peace of mind in that your data is secure and protected even from physical threats such as theft or accidents. In addition, you don't have to "remember" to do a backup, which is a lot less hassle for you and your staff. However, offsite backups do require an internet connection and involves ongoing fees, versus physical backup media purchases.

External hard drives will back up your data in original format and hold more data than CDs, tapes, or flash drives. However, they are portable and easily subject to threat or accident, and require staff time/responsibility.

CDs are simple to burn but are limited in capacity and require a backup application and CD burner (as well as staff time/responsibility). Furthermore, they are extremely portable and very easily subject to theft or accident. Tapes offer similar restrictions, are typically slow, and are best used for after-hours backups. Flash drives are also slow, and can lose or degrade data in addition to the problems of limited storage capacity, portability, and staff time.

### Conclusion

As we can see, no software package in and of itself can make an office "HIPAA compliant". And as always, it is the ultimate responsibility of the practice to ensure that all standards are met. However, a good practice management system will certainly make compliance easier for both doctors and staff alike. ■

New Horizons Software, Inc., a provider of orthodontic practice management software solutions, has provided comprehensive practice management software and personalized training and support to the orthodontic community since 1988. For more information, contact NHS at 1-800-543-5999 or visit [www.NHSoftware.com](http://www.NHSoftware.com)