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## **Security Cubed: Where corporations and private citizens store their data and treasures**

*In a world of risk, we strive to find safe storage for a plethora of assets. One BC firm offers ultra-secure space to a global clientele. Here's where to store your data or park your Bugatti.*

By Guy Robertson

Japanese bankers will tell you that on the west coast of Canada there's a high security warehouse that can withstand the most violent earthquake. No winter storm can knock out its power; no high winds can breach its walls. Its fire suppression systems are constantly tested and upgraded to ensure positive reports from the teams of inspectors and auditors who visit it on behalf of clients.

Disaster planners in New York and London advise multinational corporations to use this warehouse as a safe place to store anything from artworks and confidential documents to large amounts of backup data. If an explosion destroys a client's office, warehouse teams will transmit backup data to a secure location anywhere in the world. Some firms maintain fully equipped IT rooms in the warehouse; these "hot sites" provide the highest level of backup and redundancy for business processes that must survive, no matter how dire the circumstances.



"The name of this outfit is Cube Global Storage," says Roger Wheelock, a member of the warehouse management team who greets visitors with an apology. "I'm sorry that you had trouble finding us. There's no sign outside. We like to be discreet, and know that you'll find us when you really need to."

### **Founded on granite**

You'll find Cube on the outskirts of Victoria, BC. The building sits on a massive outcropping of granite that penetrates miles into the earth. The walls and foundations have been designed to last for centuries. While it is one of the most robust structures in North America, its exterior doesn't look particularly intimidating. In fact it appears

ordinary: precisely what clients want. They feel more secure when their vital data and other assets are stored somewhere that doesn't attract attention.

“We're part of a risk management trend toward long-term, ultra secure storage, “ says Wheelock. “Over the past 20 years people have become more aware of the kind of losses that can occur during a natural disaster such as an ice storm or hurricane. And there's the possibility of a terrorist attack that leads to region-wide disruptions. It's the big events that get much of the media coverage, and influence public opinion.”

But it's also the smaller, more frequent disasters that inspire organizations in all sectors to store items at Cube. A typical example: in the head office of a European insurer, a sprinkler system activates owing to a mechanical malfunction. Thousands of paper files are soaked to illegibility. Three stand-alone workstations are drenched, and their data are lost. The vice president decides that this must not happen again. His security manager mentions Cube, and suggests that they reserve a place for the company's most vital records. A call is made, and the company arranges for vital papers and data to be stored in Cube's main vaults.

### **Individual needs**

Small fires, leaky roofs, thefts and sabotage affect not only corporations, but also private citizens. A Vancouver lawyer stores his family archives at Cube: three document boxes of photo albums, videos, diaries, and mementoes that have great sentimental value. In another area of the warehouse sit 60 boxes of rare books, first editions and finely bound volumes that would be difficult to replace. Their owner, a dedicated bibliophile, worried about the antique plumbing in his heritage house, and decided to mitigate the risk of water damage by moving his collection to Cube.

There's an art collector who stores one small box at Cube. This box contains a medieval manuscript that has significant historical value. How much is it worth? Cube personnel won't even admit that the manuscript exists, but the collector's winning bid for it was over a million dollars in the 1960s. Such a manuscript does not depreciate. Why would the collector want to store it in his house, and leave it exposed to so many risks? The cost of storing that one small box is a few dollars a year.

Lately small organizations have started to take advantage of Cube's services, particularly for operational data.

“Any small business creates and stores data,” says Maurice Auger, Cube's IT manager. “We urge our clients to be selective about what they want to store. It's common for people to keep a lot of data that's no longer needed for business purposes, particularly duplicates, files from old projects, and accounting files that should have been purged years ago.”

## **Post-disaster matters**

Auger asks clients to consider the usefulness of the data and paper files that they want to store at Cube. There's no point in storing an item that has no present or future use. Moreover, many businesses are storing data at Cube so that they can recover them after a disaster, and resume business operations.

“It's not enough to store information for post-disaster recovery,” says Auger. “You need a way to receive that information, preferably in a location secure enough for you to resume business. Clients sometimes have a hard time determining how they're going to reconnect with their vital data when they've lost their offices and IT hardware. We don't want them to get bogged down with worthless data when they're struggling to keep their operations alive. We force them to think their way through their specific disaster recovery processes, so that when things go wrong, they're prepared.”

Auger doesn't dwell on the statistics that indicate that businesses that lose their data, or are slow to recover them after a disaster, are likely to go bankrupt. After the major losses of events such as Hurricane Katrina, unprepared organizations often cease to exist. This is because when organizations lose their information systems, they lack not only their daily operational data but also their corporate identity and history. They become like amnesiacs, and can no longer function. One of the more notable characteristics about North American disasters is that while they rarely result in mass casualties, they often cause numerous IT system failures and large-scale losses of data.

Over the past 15 years, Cube has developed its backup services so that they can accommodate clients of all sizes, from the largest multinational corporation to the college student who creates term paper data on her laptop. Using Internet connections and encryption, Cube's electronic storage systems receive data from government ministries, departments and agencies. The test of Cube's usefulness in the opinion of information managers in the public sector has been its ongoing storage of extremely fragile materials including archives from the 19th century that document the administration of BC from pre-Confederation times up to the present.

## **Air quality**

To ensure that paper documents do not deteriorate, Cube personnel maintain the humidity in the building at a level appropriate for media conservation. The indoor air quality is enhanced through a filtration system that removes the smallest dust particles. Lately, however, new media have provided even greater challenges.

“Paper and good-quality microfilm will last a lot longer than some of the DVDs and CDs that clients use,” says Chris Weston, Cube's general manager. “If you want data to last for a few years, a CD is probably reliable if it's stored in optimum conditions. But if you want long-term storage, we'd recommend that you migrate the data to a more stable medium. A properly maintained hard drive is a lot safer than a CD that's inherently unstable.”

Cube is able to help clients who want to ensure the survival of any document in a variety of media. When documents are already in poor condition, the migration process can be difficult, but clients will insist on microfilming or digitizing an important document rather than losing it permanently.

The warehouse facilities can hold more than information. Recently the company constructed a storage area that Weston calls “Any Toys”: antique boats and cars, RVs, and any other vehicle that can be safely stored on large stacks. Weston notes that the value of collectors’ cars has increased enormously over the past few years, and owners are unwilling to park an early Aston Martin or Bugatti on the street.

### **Jag security**

“Collector cars can attract thieves and vandals more than standard models,” says Weston. “As well, extreme weather conditions can be hard on any vehicle. Remember what hail can do to a paint job. You can store your car in a garage, of course, and that’s acceptable for your old Toyota. But the security in many garages is not enough to keep out thieves. That’s why we’ve developed Any Toys. You can leave your classic Jag with us, and spend a couple of months on vacation, knowing that it’s completely safe. You won’t come home to a nasty surprise, such as a smashed windshield or an empty garage.”

Any Toys accommodates small boats as well, especially vintage pleasure craft that should not be moored indefinitely at a commercial marina. Cube’s environmental controls and security systems allow owners to reduce the costs of maintaining old wood and fixtures that will rot in the open air, or disappear with thieves and vandals.

“You won’t see a big advertising campaign from us,” says Wheelock. “We rely a lot on word of mouth, on what an insurer says to an IT manager or art collector or disaster planner at a closed-door meeting. Mind you, these days, there are a lot of those meetings. It’s a risky age. Fortunately we’ve made preparations to survive for a very long time.”

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