



Backing up your vital data and files

By P. Hopkins



The data you collect on your computers such as photos, music and video is precious to you, but as an engineer I constantly witness people in shock after a virus or system failure realizing they have no second copy of their holiday photos or family wedding.

Loosing your ipod music is no joke, as most of it is probably paid for and can reach a hefty amount in money terms. Unless you keep every track on your ipod, using a backup to recover data would be the only answer.

There are many good ways to keep data backups, and we cover five of them in this article for you to read and decide on which method suits you best.

.1. External USB hard drive

By far the best option is to use an external hard drive. You can pickup a good 200+ gig drives for about £40 upwards which is half what most PC engineers will charge to recover the data for you on a faulty disk or computer.

Stick with a good make of drive such as Samsung or Seagate, and get at least 120gig because photo's music and video files collect up quickly.

There are also two different sizes of drive such as the 2.5 drives found in laptops and the 3.5 drives found in desktop computers. You can get both sizes in an external drive and there are also two speeds which are 7200 rpm or 5400 rpm. Always aim for a 7200rpm if you can as they have faster read/write speeds.

Most drives have a data cache built in which stores data for writing to the drive allowing your windows system to be freed up from the task quicker. You don't always get to know what the data cache size is, but if it is mentioned aim for 8meg or more and don't except bellow 4meg.

Remember the drive is for backups only, don't start using it for all sorts or it will be in the same usage pattern as your system drive/s and hence be at risk of failing sooner than if used only to backup and restore.

.2. Backup data using your DVD burning software

Most DVD burning software like Nero or Roxio have a backup option allowing you to compress and burn files to dvd from your hard drive. DVD's represent safer long term storage but each DVD can only hold 4.6 gig of data even though they say 4.7 gig.

So to backup 80 gig of compressed data you would need about 12- 15 DVD's. If the data's un-compressed then buy a pack of 25 and get busy. Of course if you own a dual layer dvd burner you can half that estimate.

If you get in to the habit of burning your photos to dvd once you get enough from your camera it should reduce the problems of data loss. This isn't the easiest way to backup data but if well taken care off a DVD will far out-live a hard drive.

.3. Cloud Storage

Not the sky type, but the online type. There are now many web sites and companies offering a cloud storage service which is basically a web-based storage location you use over the internet through your web browser or ftp client.

There are many free services for this type of storage, but you must bare these points in mind. It's not secure! Anyone at the company offering the service can view your data. If their servers go down for maintenance or acts of nature, you can't get to your data. If the service isn't using a https: secure connection or some kind of data encrypting tool, then others can see your data as its being sent over the internet.

There are good points as well, because these services normally backup their own servers meaning your backup is backed up. Transfer times between your computer and cloud storage will be slower than a hard drive and the better faster services will come at a price.

.4. Professional data backup software

If you like the pro solution and don't mind some technical doings, then try using partition software like Paragon disk tools or Drivelmage. These software tools allow you to make a bootable disk giving you access to tools that can compress your data and back it up onto another hard drive or partition or DVD's.

The two mentioned titles above have File-browser tools allowing you to actually browse and copy files from the Archive data backup image. This is good as you don't have to restore to a chosen location before you can access a file.

.5. Windows-7 Users

If you have win-7 then you can use its Backup and restore utility, which lets you setup scheduled backups to locations on your computer or to external usb drive or even to DVDs.

If you are a Win-7 professional or ultimate user you can also backup to the internet, which is back to cloud storage again.

The utility will compress data but you will still need a sizable hard drive if using the system internal drive, not forgetting you may also have system restore points and other data backups on the drive.

If you have a complete drive failure you loose your backups as well, so this method is only suitable for system mini restore points and means of rolling back any major system updates that caused problems. You are better off using external media for backups. Don't forget this applies to the similar system in Vista.

Final comments

There are some other ways to backup data, such as usb pens or memory cards, but the 5 options covered cope best with large amounts of data.

It's up to you which methods you use to keep your data safe, but do choose one, because with hard drives it can often happen suddenly without warning, leaving you data-less and at the mercy of an expensive data recovery service.

With family photos music and video you're better off getting in to the habit of putting them onto DVDs and storing them in a sensible place.

Why not buy a storage chest that holds about 800 discs. You can get them on ebay for under £30 these days. If you Buy DVDs on bulk 50-100 reels its a lot cheaper.

Pcpetes hopes you found this document useful and use the information and advice to be prepared for that unseen disaster at home and in business.