

Backups

The 5 W's for computer backups:

- Who: Anyone with important data
- What: Backups refer to keeping a copy of important data in more than one physical location/drive
- Where: Backup locations include drives that are internal, external, over a network, or on the Internet
- When: Somewhere between "continuous" and "frequently enough that you do not lose more work than you are willing to lose"
- Why: To save you time and effort in recreating important data that gets lost
- How: You could manually back up your data, but it is more effective to use an automated options.

Locations

When you lose data, you want to have a recent (or even current) copy of your data somewhere else: in a location that is physically distant from the original data so it hopefully doesn't suffer the same fate.

Assuming your original data is on an internal hard drive, you could back up to another internal hard drive. This may protect you against loss due to drive failure or virus, but likely would not save you from loss due to fire, theft, etc. The same goes for an external hard drive, unless you regularly back up and store it physically distant from the original. An option that can keep your data at a distance is a network drive: either a shared folder on another computer or a NAS (Network Attached Storage). But if the network drive is in the same building, it still could still suffer the same fate (e.g. fire, theft, etc.).

In terms of ease and safety, the best backup option is online. Online backup services provide you with some online storage space and software that keeps your data backed up.

But if you have a lot of data (say, more than 50GB), online backups may not be the best overall option. Price may be an issue, as some services charge by the GB. But transfer time may also be an issue: it can take days to restore 50GB (for example) from the Internet.

Software

Online services are usually only accessible with their own branded software, but with other backup locations, you have a choice of backup software:

- Online with a backup service MozyPro, Carbonite, etc.
- Online with an FTP backup tool like SecondCopy, etc.
- On a network, external, or internal drive with
 - built-in backup software (e.g. TimeMachine on Mac or NTBackup on Windows)
 - backup software that comes with your drive
 - free or paid backup software

Here are some backup software programs/services that Teky likes/resells:

- EzBackItUp: free but no fancy features
- QuickShadow: limited version is free, paid version is US\$25 for homes or US\$70 for offices
- MozyPro: online backup for US\$3.95/PC + US\$0.50/GB

What to back up

Now that we've discussed some of your backup destination and software choices, we need to consider what to back up. You basically have two choices: everything, or just your data.

When you back up everything, you back up every file on your computer: operating system files, program files, and data. You do it in such a way that you can restore it quickly, minimizing the "break-fix" time in the case of catastrophic failure; but there is one challenge and one downside to this approach. The challenge is to back up files from the same computer that you are running the backup from: without an innovative program or innovative approach, some files are simply "locked" and cannot be backed up. The downside to this approach is the volume of data: there can be gigabytes of data (that doesn't change much over time) that takes a long time to back up.

My suggestion is to simply back up your data files: these are the irreplaceable files on your computer. The rest of the files (operating system and programs) can be reloaded from disks or downloads. It may take longer to get back up and running after a catastrophic failure, but small issues (e.g. accidentally deleted files) can be resolved quickly, and the overall backup process is much simpler and faster.

So what is your data and where do you find it? Some backup software takes care of deciding what is your data, so you don't need to know the details; with other programs, you need to tell them exactly what to back up.

Simply speaking, the data you should back up includes your documents, your pictures, email, contacts, and favourite websites. Depending on the operating system and programs you are using, this may include a different number of files and folders. If you are a single user using Windows 7, Windows Live Mail, and Internet Explorer, you would likely back up the following folders, all under C:\Users\:

- My Documents
- My Pictures
- Desktop
- AppData (a hidden folder)
- Contacts
- Favorites

For other operating systems, email tools, and browsers, the list is slightly different. It takes a little research to determine data locations for each program, but there are lots of resources available to you including the Internet.

One Google search located this website, which is a good place to start for more information:

<http://www.optimizingpc.com/install/backupdata.html>



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