



'Living In a Tech World' Column

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Rick Melchior (techguy@vccdigital.com)

10 Ways to Muck-up Your Tech World: #10 – Don't Make Back-up Copies of Any of Your Computer Data

Most computer users have a lot of documents, pictures, financial information, music and other information on their computer. The more you use your computer; the more data you have accumulated. You have certainly heard about 'backing up' it's just difficult to find the time or remember to do it. Besides, we generally don't keep copies of every CD, every piece of paper, book and picture that we have. It just isn't something we do even though if we lost any of these things it would certainly muck-up our day.

It is true that one of the most dangerous things you can do is put everything important on your computer. There is the chance that you will lose the entire computer or it will be rendered useless by a power surge. There are many ways data can be corrupted and made unusable. But foremost it is a matter of when, not if, your hard drive dies.

But data is tiny, in the physical sense, and making identical copies of everything on your computer is simple. You just need a plan and little software to help. The cost of making backups is immaterial compared to the value of the data you will save. Years ago we generally thought of backing up to a CD because external drives were still expensive but CD's were easily damaged and lost so it was only slightly better than nothing. Today a 500 GB external hard drive is less than \$100. That size drive will hold 100,000 photographs or 125,000 mp3 songs. It will hold years of personal data like tax files or letters and receipts. You get the idea, such a drive will handle years of collected data. An external drive is the first step in a developing a good backup strategy.

To really protect yourself you should consider a double backup strategy. One backup copy will be kept on an external drive that is connected to your computer. The second should be kept off premises to protect it from loss of your entire house or theft. You might consider keeping the second backup of your office data at home and your home data at the office. If you have a safe deposit box an external drive is small enough to be kept there. But there is an even more convenient off-premises option that we'll get to later. The key here is to have a simple way to copy your data so you do so frequently (or automatically) and then have an additional copy a distance away.

There is a large choice of backup software. Some of the things to look for is software that does an automatic scheduled backup or creates a copy of files as soon as they are saved on your primary drive. You should also make sure the software does incremental backups, that is, it checks your data and only backs up files that are new or have changed since the last backup.

A familiar name selling this software is Symantec Norton which may be the company protecting your computer from viruses. Their backup software, Norton Backup, meets all of the requirements discussed above. But there are also numerous shareware and freeware backup programs. A good place to look is Snapfiles.com (<http://preview.tinyurl.com/p7trxw>). The software offered here is safe and in most cases there are trial downloads of shareware and several good freeware programs. Check out our website for recommendations on specific programs.

Next you need off premise backup and the latest way to do that is to upload your files to a server in the “Cloud” as internet servers have begun to be known. There are numerous providers including Microsoft’s “Skydrive” with a generous 25GB of free storage and “Dropbox”, 2GB free and a paid upgrade. Both are easy to use and in the case of Microsoft, at least, are not likely to close the service anytime soon. For more information you can go to this PCMagazine review article (<http://tinyurl.com/6s4dr2>), search ‘online backup’ or our website for specific recommendations.

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