



Prevent disaster : back up your precious data!

Description

We have all collected a lot of information, documents, and photos on our computers over the years. What would happen if your computer was to crash? Or if your drive becomes unreadable? All those precious documents and photos will be lost. This is just as bad as losing all the photos in a fire: there is no way to retrieve them. That is, unless you have a plan in place.

It can happen to anybody

A couple of weeks ago, my computer started acting very slowly. I noticed it when I was looking at my emails and it would take minutes to display each one. I knew this was not supposed to be the case. Thinking it was malware-related, I paid a visit to [VirtualDr forum](#). I knew I could get some help. Sure enough, Broni helped me and the diagnosis came down: the computer was totally clean, and the problem was NOT malware related. The other options were not as pleasant. More tests indicated bad sectors on my hard drive. THAT is a bad sign. Many bad sectors (and I had 99) are often the sign of the beginning of the end. I was lucky in two ways: I found that problem before the total failure of the HD, and **I had an automatic backup made on a daily basis**. This meant that I would not lose my data even if the HD had completely failed. I didn't need to panic. I set up an appointment with the technician and now, my computer is running as it should. Has this ever happened to you? Did you ever wonder what would happen if you lost all your photos, layouts, documents, programs, and other data? What do you do to prevent such a disaster?

In this day and age, so much is stored on our computers now. Sometimes, information is ONLY available on your computer and you don't even have a paper version. This means that losing it can be a real problem. There are many tools and habits that can help you save your precious information. Let's have a look at some of them.

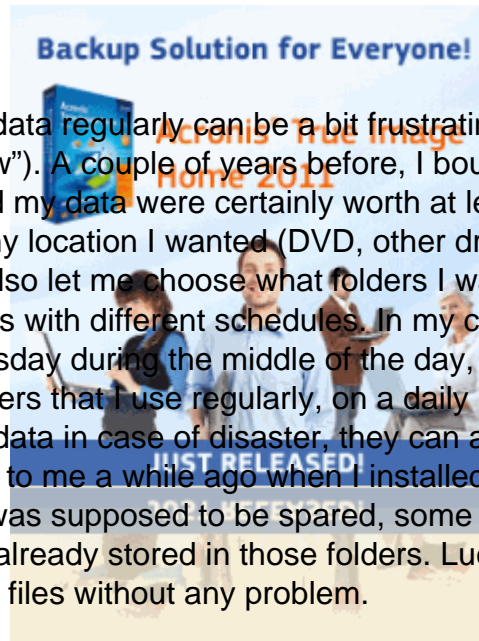
Manual backup

Once in a while, you have to do something to your computer that might affect your data. When you

know such an event is coming, you can choose to make your own backup. You can save some critical data on DVD (like some downloaded programs) or on External Hard Drives (EHD). You can choose to save all your files from a certain period onto some DVDs and repeat the process every year (like all your 2010 photos, and all your emails for the month). Nowadays, EHDs are more and more affordable. Although they are not 100% infallible, they surely can be good support for backups. DVDs can be very useful too, but depending on the amount of information you need to store on them, you might end up having quite a pile of them. Windows has a function to make manual backups. I am sure Mac would too. Set yourself a reminder if you want to make manual backups on a regular basis.

Automatic backup

Making sure you back up your data regularly can be a bit frustrating because it is so easy to forget or procrastinate ("I'll do it tomorrow"). A couple of years before, I bought [Acronis True Image Home](#). It cost me about \$50, but I figured my data were certainly worth at least that much! Acronis allowed me set a schedule of backups in any location I wanted (DVD, other drives, EHD) and even in two separate locations at the same time. It also let me choose what folders I wanted to be backed up. I could also set up different types of backups with different schedules. In my case, I chose to do a full system backup every week (on Wednesday during the middle of the day, when I usually was at work), and incremental backups of the folders that I use regularly, on a daily basis. Although backups are often thought of as a way to recover data in case of disaster, they can also be used in case of accidental deletion of files. This happened to me a while ago when I installed a newer version of a program. Although the previous version was supposed to be spared, some folders were overwritten. That meant I had lost all the files that were already stored in those folders. Lucky for me, I had a previous backup and I was able to retrieve those files without any problem.



Online backup

Online backups generally have the advantage of saving your data if something physical happens to your computer and its surroundings (like a flood or other natural disaster). Any online backups, however, have one disadvantage: they have to rely on your particular internet connection and your specific plan too. If you are on dial-up, using online backup will be a very long process. If you have a limited bandwidth plan, you could easily go over that limit in a short time, incurring some hefty additional fees. With a good speed internet connection and an unlimited bandwidth plan, you might want to consider online backups. Here are some possible online services:

Acronis

[Acronis True Image Home](#) does offer an online option for its backup. It will go up to 250GB and will cost about \$5 a month. One interesting advantage of this service is that you can use it in combination with your automatic backups and you can choose to backup only certain folders, or go differential (which means that it will only save the files that were changed since the last backup instead of saving everything all over again). Maybe that could help those with limited bandwidth plans or those with a slower internet connection.

Other services

[Mozy](#), [Carbonite](#), [Blackblaze](#), [CrashPlan](#), are other known online backup services. Their costs are kind of similar at the start, but you will have to check more details. Some services will let you backup EHD in addition to your internal HD but others won't. Other services will let you back up more than one computer while some may charge you more. Some will charge you a flat fee for up to a certain amount of storage space, but then, you will pay an additional fee for more than that basic limit. You will also want to check if the backup will be dependent on the current content of your computer, and backup will only mirror what you have or if you can delete files from your computer and still have them backed up and save on their server. You will also have to ask about retrieving your data in case you lose your own copy. How do you get them? Do you have to download them (meaning it will take time and bandwidth)? Can you get them on an HD by mail? Do you have to pay for the retrieval service? If so, how much? Can you retrieve only part of the stored data or do you have to get everything even if you only need some?

Check them out

Although I mentioned some online backup services, you can surely find different ones if you search the net. New services might come up, old ones might disappear. Costs and features can change over time too. Check things out for yourself. Do your research. Ask around for recommendations; try services before you buy into them if it is possible.

What would you do if you lost your data tomorrow? Do you have a backup plan? When is the last time you backed up your precious photos or files?

[Here](#) is a more recent post specifically about Backblaze, which is the service I had to switch to when Acronis stopped offering personal backup services.

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