

From: Steve Gimnichier <gimnichier@gmail.com>
Subject: Communication from your computer guy: Backing up your data
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Ok, I'm going to tell you something and you need to really hear me: **YOUR COMPUTER'S HARD DRIVE WILL CRASH.** I can't tell you when it will happen, only that it will happen. And, to make matters worse, it will likely happen without any warning. Everything will have been fine yesterday, but today your computer won't even boot up! On the sad day that this happens, all the data that is on your hard drive will be gone: pictures, music, financial data, documents, customer lists; all gone forever. Imagine the impact to your personal and/or business life! (in the interest of complete information, there are companies that can recover some or even most data from crashed hard drives, but the cost is typically several thousand dollars.)

It isn't just a hardware failure that can cause you to lose that precious hard drive. Computer viruses, computer theft, or natural disasters such as earthquakes or fire can also rob you of everything.

So, what should you do? The answer is simple: you need to copy your data to something other than your hard drive! By having one or more copies of your data, should the primary copy on your hard drive be gone, you have another copy that you can access. But, maintaining current copies isn't always done. Everyone is busy, forgetful, or in denial, so even when you make copies, they quickly age and if too much time has passed, may become useless. And, even if you make a copy, if that copy is at the same location as your computer, you could still lose everything in case of disaster.

Backing things up is like buying an insurance policy: you have to decide how much you really need. Luckily, there are many cost effective choices available.

Here are some general guidelines:

If you have just a small amount of data you care about (< 700mb):
--> burn a CD periodically with current copies

If you have about 4gb of data:
--> burn a DVD periodically or use a USB flash drive with current copies

If you have hundreds or thousands of gigabytes of data you care about, then purchase an external hard drive, which typically also comes with software that will automatically keep your copied data current on the external drive. If you have multiple computers, each computer's data can be copied over your network to a single external hard drive (although that might require different software than what came with your external hard drive).

If you have a fast internet connection, then on-line backup is always an option, although you have to be comfortable with all of your personal data being under the control of someone else, plus recovering all the data might take many hours or even days.

If you choose not to use an on-line service, then you need to decide if you want offsite backup (i.e., an additional copy of your data stored in a different location) in addition to your onsite backup.

In general, I recommend a fast external hard drive for home use and two external hard drives for small businesses: one for onsite backup

and a second for offsite backup. Software can be set up that automatically keeps the backup drives current with the latest data.

Note that in general, installed applications cannot be backed up (unless you create a complete disk image), so when you purchase applications, make sure you keep license keys and the installation programs safe should you have to reinstall them.

Finally, it is a good idea to create a test file, verify that it is backed up, and then go through the restore steps so that you know how to do it when the day arrives.

In this article, I have just covered some of the general approaches to backing up data. Please contact me if you have questions or would like me to set up an appropriate backup system for you, but whatever you do, if you aren't backing up your data today, please do so.

Periodically, I email information to my customers.

As always, I hope you have found this information useful. If you do not wish to receive these emails in the future, let me know.

Steve Gimnichner
Gimnichner Computer Services
www.gimnichner.com
650-222-4140
gimnichner@gmail.com