

Backing Up Your Data - Do's and Don't and How To's

We all know we're supposed to back up data. Sometimes we might actually do so. Backing up your data is important, and yet it is often a neglected part of using computers. Data can be lost rather easily. Human error, a virus, or simply a computer crash can wipe out important documents, photos, contact lists and more.

Backing up your data is important to everyone, not just businesses. Imagine all those photos you took of your children growing up, now sitting on your hard drive. What about your video and music collection? Perhaps you've heard about entire collections of documents lost from your friends' or coworkers' computers. The stories are haunting. All those years of searching and collecting of that data, and it can be wiped out in an instant. Could you ever replace all that information?

Hard Drives Are Not Always Safe

The truth is that hard drives don't live forever. Even if you've never had an incident with a virus during the life of an existing hard drive, it will eventually wear out. Your hard drives are also always vulnerable to viruses, or from a power surge, which can also cause them to fail. You may try to use data recovery programs, but prevention is always better than hoping your data will be able to be recovered.

When hard drives fail, it might be difficult to replace all that information. If you use your computer for a business, it is even more important, as that could be hundreds of thousands of dollars of information that you are risking by not backing up your hard drives. Depending on your hard drives and virus protection alone is very risky when you have so much that you are responsible for.

How Often Should You Back Up Data?

This question is often debated. Some suggest every day, or a week, others suggest every time they upload anything new. Some are comfortable with simply doing it once a month.

How often you choose to back up your data is up to you. A good rule of thumb is to back up your data as often as you have new and important data to back up. For example, businesses that depend on contact data management programs and update important information daily might find it better to back up every day at the end of the day -- of just that data. Other documents and folders that are not updated quite as often can possibly be updated once a week or once a month.

It might completely depend on the type of data you want to back up. It is easy enough to set up a routine. Back up important data every day or week regularly and get into the habit of doing so. You can set your computer to remind you of when you need to back up. There are also programs that will do your back ups for you when you want it to. There's more information on these programs later in this article.

What Data To Back Up

It is true; you don't always need to back up everything on your computer. What you should decide now is what is important to you to save. Here's a list of things you should consider backing up.

Family photos

Films

Music

Stories and documents

Bookmarks

Address book (emails and addresses of families and friends or business clients)

To do lists

Presentations

Old emails

Work files and folders

Games

There might be many more types of files you want to save. You should go through your computer and think about any information you would not want to lose if your hard drive should fail.

How To Back Up Your Data

It is now easier than ever to back up your data. It all starts with knowing what data you want to save, and keeping it in centralized locations on your PC. If you know what to save, you know exactly what to do and to work it into a routine. Learn where your data is.

The next step is selecting what data you want to save and when. Perhaps you have documents that you wrote a year ago, but at the moment you don't want to use and yet you want to keep them anyway. Obviously such files only need to be stored once in your chosen locations. By separating your documents into when you need to save them, you'll find it easier to do back ups. It'll also take a lot less time to do a back up on just items that were updated recently, not all your files all the time.

Once you have your files separated, there's a couple of ways to back up your data. There's also a way to back up your hard drive so if it should ever fail, you won't have to remember all the programs you had and having to reinstall them again. We'll get to that in a minute.

Doing It Yourself

Here's the old reliable way of doing data recovery. You could back up your data on burned disks, and it is a good idea, but a disk can be scratched or lost. It's a good idea to utilize burning CDs with your information, but you should also have additional copies in other areas. If you burn a disk with important information, do yourself a favor and burn two copies, keeping the second one at a different location, like a safety deposit box.

Another way to do this is to get a flash drive. An additional external drive that you can store your files on. It acts as an additional hard drive. You could regularly back up your data files on these flash drives.

Both of these storage methods are rather inexpensive over time. A flash drive could cost \$200 or so but is worth it for all the years it will save your data for you. CDs cost only \$1 - \$3 each depending on the type, and a CD burner costs as little as \$50.

While using them is highly recommended, it is often the hardest habit to get into, even when you devote yourself to doing it regularly. It is easy to forget to back up your drives like this. If you don't trust yourself to do this regularly, there's another method of backing up your files.

Internet Based Data Storage

There are companies now that will help you store your data for you.

Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com/>) does provide storage of your files. This would be for your Word, Excel and other documents. You can store and share your files online. Many people like it and use it for work documents. You still have to manually upload the documents every time though.

Another useful tool is Xdrive (<http://www.xdrive.com/>), which offers 5 GB of storage space for free. Their download also features a way to automatically back up your selected files as you need. Need more space? They offer 50 GB of storage for a fee.

Yet another utility, Mozy (<http://mozy.com/>) offers 2 GB free, and for a small monthly fee you get additional storage. They offer both home and professional versions of their services.

Ghost (<http://www.symantec.com/themes/ghost/index.jsp>), provided by Symantec, not only backs up your data, but also your entire hard drive. If your

hard drive is ever wiped out, you have a Ghost to restore an exact copy of the last backup made. It'll store your software and files exactly as you had it before. It also constantly updates itself when you want it to.

Recommendations

To completely cover your hard drive, here's the recommended steps:

1. Section off files you don't need all the time, and perhaps those files you don't really access at all and store those files on burned CDs or flash drives, making duplicate sets, one for the office and one for off site. Replace them with updated versions with additional "no need" files once every two months or so.
2. Set files aside that you use every day, and set a system like Xdrive or Mozy to download in the evening when you sleep to store your data.
3. If you don't run a lot of software, or you have all your disks, or you wouldn't miss a lot of the software that you have there isn't much more to be done. However, if you do, and want to prevent having to re-install all those programs, and have an extra data back up feature, go ahead and get a program like Ghost, programmed to update at least once a month.

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About the Author

Korey Bachelder is the owner of MediaRECOVER, a provider of [data recovery software](#) and [restore service provider](#). When your backups fail (or you failed to make one), MediaRECOVER software will get your important information and images back from virtually any storage medium.