Computer Backup Options

Usually when we talk about 'backups' we're really talking about copying data from our computer to some place other than our computer just in case our hard drive crashes.

You may choose from 3 options depending upon which one suits YOUR needs best.

1. Copy data from your computer that you do not want to loose to a CD, a USB drive or to an external drive. This is what I do. See below.
2. Create a **Mirror Image** of your Hard Drive onto an external hard drive or to a large USB drive using a program such as Acronis or Norton's Ghost. Should your hard drive crash, you either repair it or replace it and then replace the mirror image of it back to your computer. See below
3. Use the **Backup feature** in Microsoft Operating System to backup your hard drive. You can choose what you wish to backup. The drawback with a true backup program is that in all those I've seen, you must RESTORE the data back to your hard drive in order to open and view a file.

Click Start...programs...accessories....system tools...backup

With the first two above, you can open any files and view them, copy them,edit them, etc.
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Please tell me the proper way to back up my hard drive. I have not done it and I have added new programs and want to do it the correct way.

There is a backup program in XP although XP doesn't make it easy to find....probably because it doesn't work any better than the older versions of MS backup.

There are a number of imaging programs that can be purchased such as Norton's Ghost which will create an image of your hard drive and in event of hard drive failure, when your hard drive is repaired, you can then restore that image right back to that hard drive. This requires that you have lots of storage space available. I prefer a simpler route.

What I recommend is this
1. Keep all your install disks in a safe place in case you have a hard drive failure, you can reinstall after repair or replacement of the hard drive.
2. Make a set of Recovery Disks for your computer in case your computer won't start and you can't get to the Recovery that is on a partition of your c:\ drive...unless of course you were fortunate enough to have gotten Recovery disks with your computer.
3. Any programs, drivers,etc that you download from web sites, download to the DOWNLOAD folder you create under MY DOCUMENTS. If you need to reinstall those you'll have them.

4. All Pictures and Documents you create, should be saved in a folder you create under MY DOCUMENTS or in a folder you create under the MY PICTURES folder in the MY DOCUMENTS FOLDER.

With all the above said, you are now ready to do your backup...which is to **copy** the MY DOCUMENTS either to an external hard drive, to a CD or send it via a network to another computer on your network.
This way, **should a crash occur** you have the option to:

1. Do a System Restore back to a date when all was well, if your computer will start to SAFE MODE.
2. Use the Recovery Disk to just recover the Applications if the problem is with corrupted files in the OS.
3. Or worse scenario is to do a full Format and Recovery using your Recovery disks which means wiping the hard drive clean and then the recovery disk will reinstall the OS and programs just like it came from the factory. In this case, you will then need to reinstall any programs you have added to your computer. AND copy back the MY DOCUMENTS FOLDER to replace the MY DOCUMENTS folder on your clean formatted machine. And also, remember to update your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs once reinstalled.

What I have elected to do is to invest in an external Hard drive and I save everything to it as I create stuff rather than saving to my C:\ drive. About every 3 months, I move a copy of the My Documents folder to another computer on my network into a folder I call Laptop backup, replacing the one stored that on last backup, then I compress and copy the contents of MY DOCUMENTS folder to CDs. Just in case.

It works for me.
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Acronis from Virginia Mauldin of the VCC

I use Acronis 9 to clone (make an exact copy) of my hard drive onto an external drive. Then if I want to replace a dying hard drive or upgrade to a larger c hard drive (I've done both) I disassemble the external drive, remove the drive, remove the c drive in the computer and connect the clone. (that process really is easy). Since it is exactly the same, life goes on as before. I can also update the clone from the c drive from time to time by dragging and dropping the newer files from the c drive onto the clone in the external drive using Windows Explorer.

1. attach the external drive and verify in Windows Explorer or My Computer that the system is seeing it.

2. Call up Acronis program and tell it I want to clone a disk (you can also make images or back up with Acronis also but making a clone is just as easy and all the installed programs are preserved)

3. The Acronis program walks me through choosing the source drive (c drive) and the destination drive (the external) and then I just walk away, checking back from time to time that all is progressing.

4. When Acronis says it is 100 per cent finished, I verify in Windows Explorer that some files, like documents, are just like the current c drive before disconnecting the external.

I make two clones on two different external drives about every 6 months and put one at another location away from my house as a failsafe against a catastrophe like fire or tornado or such. I can update the clone on the external from my c drive from time to time but after I have installed or eliminated some programs I reclone since it is easy so that I have a drive ready to install and use if necessary.

I like being able to change out drives and continue with all data and programs intact if something happens to my c drive or I want to upgrade to a larger drive.

I accumulated three external drives cheaply by watching the paper for good sales several years ago. Of course the external drive must be the same type (IDE or SATA) as your computer to be able to switch the drive with the one in the computer. When I started all this all computers were IDE and so are my externals. Now most computers and no doubt externals are SATA.

I keep a small 2.5 inch external drive connected to my computer all the time. It came with a backup utility on the external so my computer syncs and backs up the files I choose continually.

Thanks, Virginia. This is very good info. I have Acronis and have used it to create a mirrow image of my hard drive. Jmax

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Disaster-Proof Your PC: Image Your Drive, Make a Backup Plan
Here's how to prepare for disaster by imaging your hard drive and setting up a data backup system.

Rick Broida, PCWorld

Recommends

Last week I told you how to make a new computer hassle-free; to wit, I described how to create a system-repair disc, dump the junkware, and set up security. Now that you've got your PC just the way you want it, it's time to perform what I consider to be the ultimate hassle-prevention steps: imaging your hard drive and setting up a backup routine.

Create a Drive Image

Creating a drive image lets you restore your PC to a like-new but custom-configured state if things go awry with your system, or if disaster strikes. In theory, you'll need to image your hard drive only once (unlike regular backups, which you should perform daily or weekly). And you may never actually need the image file--but if you do, you'll be awfully glad you have it.

There are countless programs that can clone (and restore) your hard drive, but it's hard to beat Macrium Reflect Free. As the name implies, it's a freeware tool--but don't think it's any less capable than various commercial programs. In fact, PCWorld's Jon Jacobi says "its interface is the friendliest I've run across." (I'm sold.)

So, where you should store your cloned hard drive files? Macrium gives you a choice between DVDs, external drives, and even network drives. (Personally, I recommend buying an inexpensive external hard drive to use for this and other backup purposes.)

Gear Up for Backups

Once again I'm going to lecture you on the computing equivalent of flossing your teeth. Bottom line: Do it now or regret it later.

Actually, I'm not going to lecture you at all, but rather steer you to a PCWorld feature I wrote a while back: "How to Prevent a Data Disaster." It has all the information you need about creating a diversified backup plan, which for my money is the only way to ensure total safety. The one item that needs updating is that an app I recommended is now defunct. DocSyncer made it possible to sync your local documents with your Google Docs account. Fortunately, a free tool called OffiSync can take its place.

Back Up Windows 7 Libraries

I'm a big fan of Windows 7's Libraries feature, which makes it easy to find documents, music, pictures, and videos scattered across various locations on your hard drive. There's just one problem: Libraries don't support network locations. That's a pretty huge hassle for anyone who has multiple PCs, as sometimes the files you want are sitting on another hard drive.

Enter the Win7 Library Tool, a handy little freebie that makes it easy to add network folders to your Libraries. So, for example, if I want to view the digital photos on my wife's PC, I can now add her Photos folder to my Pictures Library. Just as handy, the tool provides a centralized location for tweaking your Library settings. It even lets you change the icons for various Libraries.

My favorite Win7 Library Tool feature is backups: You can save a set of libraries for later restoration, like after you've reinstalled Windows or migrated to a computer.

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