

# 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.