

## THE COMPUTER CORNER

# No. 192: Backup in the Cloud

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Thanks to Gary Sutcliffe (W9XT) for suggesting this subject. Cloud backup generally means that you are backing up your data to an online storage facility, where copies of your data reside on that facility's hard drives. This can be a boon, and some of the online storage services have some very nice features that automate the process. For example, some put a folder on your desktop; when you drop a file in it, it is sent out via the Internet to the storage facility. For small amounts of data, it can be free. On the other hand, it can be expensive if dealing with a lot of data, and there are some concerns for privacy of the data as well for any site that is not under your physical control. On the other hand, an off-site facility could save your data if your home computer(s) are destroyed, such as in a fire.

Dropbox is the one everyone thinks of because it was the first such program/service around. It claims over 200 million users currently, and has servers scattered around the world. You can sign up for 2 Gb of free storage, and you can gain an additional half gig for every friend that you proselytize to sign up. They offer storage above the 2 Gb minimum for about a buck a gig (per year). Note, however, that if you do not access (add to or remove from or copy from) your 2 Gb of data for a year, they can erase it! Be sure to read the fine print from any of these services you might choose. Dropbox or a similar free service might well be your answer if 2 Gb will cover your needs. If security of an off-site facility is a concern for you, it might be more secure to purchase a USB hard drive and backup your files at home.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of some possibilities you might explore for off site backup. Data is current as of February 2014, and not all plans are shown for each company. Just Google the ones that interest you for details.

- Backblaze.** \$5/month/computer/unlimited storage. \$3.96/month for the 2-year plan.
- Bitcasa.** Free/2 Gb. \$10/month/1Tb.
- Crashplan.** \$5.99/month/computer/unlimited; \$13.99/month/unlimited/2 or more computers.
- Carbonite.** \$59.99/year/unlimited.
- Dropbox.** Free/2Gb of storage.
- SOS.** \$9.99/month/100Gb.
- Livedrive.** \$8/month/computer/unlimited.
- MozyHome.** Free/2Gb of storage. \$5.99/month/50 Gb/1 computer
- Spideroak.** Free/2 Gb. \$10/month/100 Gb.
- Zoolz.** \$3/month/computer/unlimited space. \$2/month if you buy 5 years.

Now, having provided you with enough data to get you started in cloud computing, let me reflect that I personally do not/would not use even a free service for backing up data, for several reasons. One is security concerns, mentioned above. For example, even some avid users of one or another of the backup companies above will not put sensitive personal data on them, such

as income tax information, social security numbers, banking or investment information and the like, for fear the backup may be compromised. Another concern is policy changes. Companies are purchased by others all the time, and the ensuing mergers may cause changes to policy that users do not agree with. Users may have little recourse but to shop for another backup solution.

My own approach to the problem of backups is through a careful plan of on-site networking and backup software. Each of my five computers contains a C: partition for Windows, a D: partition for programs and an E: partition for data – all the creations my wife or I generate. While the C: and D: partitions vary somewhat depending on the version of Windows and the software needed for that computer's mission, the E: partitions on all five computers are completely identical. Every new creation (letters, articles such as the one you are reading now, PowerPoint presentations, drawings, etc.) is written to the other 4 computers shortly after creation. Two of the computers are in the basement and three are on the top floor. It is unlikely that the hard drives of all five would be destroyed at one time. Plus, I store periodic backups on DVDs, as well.

That is my approach, and it has worked for me in the past. The scheme has been reality tested when hard drives have failed. When a hard drive dies, I simply put in a new one, load Windows on the C: partition and critical programs on D:, then get it on the network and restore the entire E: drive from one of the other 4 copies of it.

On the other hand, a cloud backup solution may work better for you, and you now have a start with the list in this article. I leave you with a single thought: no matter how you do it, do it! It is said that there is a gremlin in every computer who is ready to sting you if you do not do backups, but if you do, he will mostly leave you alone. Happy computing.

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*"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out."*

-Decca Recording Company, rejecting the Beatles, 1962.