

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 160 You're Not Listening!

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I have harped on this topic before, but some folks just refuse to listen! When buying a new computer or when re-installing the Operating System in an old one, partition the drives in a lifesaving manner. Make a partition (C:) Windows. Make another (D:) just for programs. And make a third (E:) for everything you create. What proportions? If you are not much into pictures, about 2:2:1. If you take a lot of pictures, you might want to change the proportions to 1:1:3. Thus, with a 500 Gb drive:

DRIVE	NOT HEAVY ON PHOTOS	HEAVY ON PHOTOS
C:	200 Gb	100 Gb
D:	200 Gb	100 Gb
E:	100 Gb	300 Gb

This will give you tons of space for all your stuff.

In my Windows 7 installation, the Operating System takes just over 29 Gb on Drive C:, with all the frills and a few programs that will only install to the C: drive. An XP installation will take about half of that (I just checked a couple to see). On D:, the programs take about 4.5 Gb. The E: drive, with my creations (all my created documents and just a few pictures) take about 3 Gb of space. Well under 40 Gb in a system with few pictures. Thus, we are talking about using just 29% of the C: partition, 5% of the D: partition and about 1/3 of 1% of the E: partition, assuming it is set up as in "Heavy on Photos" in the table above. Lots and lots of free space.

If you are heavy into pictures, assume each photo will take 2 megabytes on average. A 100 Gb partition will therefore be able to hold around 50,000 pictures, and a 300 Gb partition will hold about 150,000. If your pictures take more than an average of 2 Mb each, calculate accordingly. And, don't forget, your old pictures should be moved periodically to DVDs or an external drive, then erased from your main hard drive. It is not wise at all to use your main hard drive for archiving old stuff. Why? *Because a hard drive will certainly fail.* It may be a year, 2 years, 10 years or next week. But, it will fail. Without backups, you loose everything.

Again, the purpose is to protect your creations by backing them up. The operating system and your programs can easily be replaced, but there is no replacement source for that picture of your family or the letter of commendation you received from your boss. Cover yourself. At least twice a year, copy the entire contents of that E: drive to DVDs or some other external device. USB hard drives are OK, but they can fail, too. Better are DVDs, or even plain old CDs. A CD holds about 0.7 Gb, so I could easily back up my entire E: partition with just five CDs. A DVD holds 4.7 Gb, so just one will do the job. A double-layer DVD holds 8.5 Gb, somewhat over 4,000 pictures, assuming each picture averages 2 Mb. Don't forget, though, your burner must be capable of writing double-layer DVDs if you want to go that route. Not a problem, though, since many will. And a new drive that will write double-layer DVDs is relatively cheap these days.

Don't worry about the OS or your programs. Presumably you have the CD for Windows (if you don't, you were cheated, because you paid for it when you bought that computer). Or, you can always buy a new copy of the OS and install it. Same with your programs, though most applications can be found now in freeware, which means only that you need to download and

install. If you bought Word, make sure you have the CDs and installation passwords at hand. Or, move to Open Office, a totally free alternative. CYA!

Why am I saying this? A friend of mine chose to purchase a backup program to protect his data, instead of partitioning as suggested above and burning an occasional DVD of his E: drive. Then, the catastrophe happened. "No sweat", he thought, "I'll just invoke the backup program and reinstall everything". Guess what? The backup program did not work as promised. He lost his email messages and address book and a lot of family pictures, not to mention his correspondence and other personal files. Gone forever. Not a pretty picture.

CYA. CYA. CYA. That has been a consistent motto of folks in the know, who have used computers since their beginning. Listen to them.

So how do you repartition a single C: hard drive into a C:, D: and E: drive (without losing any data)? Well, perhaps next month I will present a scheme. Happy computing!