

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 310: The Cloud

de Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR, 715 N. Dries Street, Saukville, WI 53080-1664
wb9rqr@gmail.com

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There are many definitions of “the cloud”, depending on the software company involved and what it offers. For example, just about everything you do with Google can be considered cloud computing. See that gmail address above in the header? My email is actually all in the cloud, because it is held on servers that may be in one of several locations, none of which are under my control. So an all-inclusive definition of The Cloud is *“on-demand availability of computer system resources, especially data storage (cloud storage) and computing power, without direct active management by the user”* (see *Cloud Computing*, Wikipedia). Note especially the words “without direct active management by the user”, which makes cloud computing beyond reasonable risk for many of us in many circumstances, but maybe not in all.

When most of us end users think about the cloud, we think of using it for safety storage of “our stuff”. So if we have a hard drive failure or a fire or some other unexpected destruction of our home computing hardware and data, we could recover all “our stuff” (the data) from cloud storage after the hardware has been fixed or replaced. That seems a reasonable and good thing.

Now, there are other ways to do that besides storing copies in the cloud. A monthly backup of “our stuff” is one way. “Our stuff” does not include the Operating System, such as Windows itself, which can be replaced easily in other ways. It also does not include individual programs; these can also be replaced in other ways. But it does include our *creations*, such as letters, articles, photos, stories, poems and other data that we capture or create ourselves. Those are largely irreplaceable.

Want to make a monthly backup easy? There is a free program available at Majorgeeks called Fbackup (version 9.8.840, 17Nov2023) that can help. Written and made available by a long-standing, solid software company called Softland, this totally free program (the only cost is an occasional nag ad about other of their pay-for products) will automatically compile a zipped copy of all “your stuff” each day, month, week, or at whatever interval you would like. You can then transfer that copy to a DVD disc or other storage space of your liking, such as another hard drive, or computer or wherever you wish. If you don’t segregate “my stuff” as I do, you can specify what files you want backed up when you set up the program, no matter where they are on your hard drive.

In my case, selecting “my stuff” is incredibly easy, since all my creations are segregated on an E: drive (my Windows 10 is restricted to C: and programs are all kept on D:). That is a ploy I have been advocating for years. So all I have to do is include everything in my weekly backup found on the E: drive excluding any system files or folders that I don’t want to back up. Then, the backup is done automatically Wednesday at 3:47 a.m. while I am sleeping, and is ready for transfer to a DVD or another computer or offsite the next morning. The only thing I MUST do is to suppress the tendency to forget copying the zipped backup to a DVD or another computer. If I did forget, a catastrophic failure of my main machine would then leave me without an up-to-date weekly backup! Yes, there is a way to get around the problem. Fbackup will copy a freshly made backup to another computer.

So, what I have done in this article is to show you how to make useful backups of your creations at intervals of your choosing that can be moved off your machine and even stored off site with little effort and at no cost other than for a DVD. I have ignored using the cloud in this process because the cloud involves risk. Putting your data in the cloud by using Microsoft OneDrive (now called Microsoft Azure) or Dropbox or other brands of the cloud means your data must be encrypted and sent to them, or encrypted by them, and exposed to manipulation by strangers to store it on servers not under your control, often at the cost of a fee. Why not do it yourself and avoid fees and the risk of manipulation by strangers? Especially now that I have shown you an easy, practically no-cost method. Why not avoid the risk of a server that is not under your control going down with your data in it? The backup method and program I have referenced for you makes it free and easy to manage yourself.

Try it. Then if you find it as easy as I have described, uninstall Azure or other cloud-using brands. Note that I said UNINSTALL, not erase. HiBit Uninstaller is a free and easy program to do just that, and it will not leave pieces and bits laying around to clutter up your Registry or other areas in your machine as will the Windows Control Panel Uninstall Programs application or some other uninstall software. Get HiBit Uninstaller at Majorgeeks! Happy Computing!