

Useful Online Computer Tools

Adapted from my own searches and information from the internet.

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It's not the first time. It's happened before. A hard drive crash -- This time the drive is dead. How are you going to piece things back together?

You do backup your system, don't you?

I have heard stories of well meaning individuals that do back up their system, but never checked the backups and when you really need the back up, it is either missing or corrupted.

Again, the question becomes "how do you piece things back together?".

What Online tools can you put into place now, that will be useful if/when your hard drive dies.?

Let's look at a list of useful online tools. These tools are even more useful because in their basic form, they have no cost involved.

1. Backup:

There are several different types of backups.

a. A system backup that attempts to backup everything on your hard drive to a separate drive (a complete image of your drive). Usually this requires some hefty external hard drive.

b. Partial backups that only capture your data (documents, spreadsheets, presentations, images, music, etc). Not a total backup but perhaps all of your document, spreadsheets, presentations, etc will fit into an online backup system such as Syncplicity. They allow a 2gb backup of files for no charge. For more advanced usage, it will cost you approximately 10 dollars per month.

If you use a Mac or Linux, syncplicity is not for you. It is a windows only application or service.

An Alternate service (with expanded storage size -- 50gb of space) that is xp, mac, & linux friendly is **adrive.com**. It appears ok. it's upload/download applications work, but I would like to see an easier method of multiple file uploads/downloads. I have have been using it for about 6 months. They have modified their service over the months and it seems to be easier to you. It doesn't offer synchronization.

1. Another storage option for certain file types (document files, spreadsheet files, presentation files and pdf files) can be stored in google docs -- a feature of gmail.com
2. (see gmail in#2)

Link: <http://www.syncplicity.com>

link: <http://www.adrive.com>

2. Emails:

All those special notes, informational emails that you received and have been keeping for years on your local computer will be gone if your hard drive is totally dead. Why not switch to a stable online email service where your emails (received or sent) are stored on their backed up servers? I recommend gmail. Not only does gmail give you this email storage feature, it has other features called google docs where you can store spreadsheets, document files, presentation files and even pdf files.

Another email service is yahoo.com's email service. I know some of you now use it, I even have an account on yahoo.com, but don't use it enough to give any recommendations.

Link: <http://gmail.com>

Link: <http://yahoo.com>

3. Those great pictures:

Check out Picasa for you digital picture storage for free. It is available for XP, Mac, & Linux. Picasa normally detects your operating system and will direct you to the proper operating system area for download of it's application.

Link: <http://picasa.google.com>

4. Bookmark Service:

Xmarks (formerly foxmarks) -- I do a lot of internet searching for myself & others. By installing the Xmarks add-on to my browser, my bookmarks are all available on my laptop, my home computer & if for some reason, I am on some other computer, I can retrieve any bookmark I have stored with Xmarks. I like that this service offers me the ability to access all of these online, as well as have them at my fingertips any time I need them. The big reason for the bookmark service is if my hard drive dies -- I still have all my bookmarks available to be re-installed on a new drive. Can I have a happy face on that??? :-)

<http://www.xmarks.com/>

5. Passwords:

Your hard drive with all information on your passwords (usernames & passwords) is gone. Would there be a way to protect this information. You could use a password manager where all your passwords are stored encrypted at a remote site for you.

I am using keepassX which was originally only for linux, but now has versions for Windows XP and Mac.

Once you have gathered all your username and password information into an encrypted file, you should upload it to some safe location such as adrive.com for backup.

Link: <http://www.keepassx.org/>

6. Software licenses:

Some of my new software is obtained by downloading and I don't get a physical copy on CD. If practical, I make a copy of the downloaded software to cd and also store the downloaded installation software in a special folder on my pc that is backed up regularly. It is wise to make a pdf copy of the software license usually sent to you in an email. I store this in my documents area as well. You can use Keepassx program that will store all of your software licenses and purchase information in encrypted form. I personally retain

the key and purchase info with my password database using keepassx. If you wish to obtain a separate application, Registration Vault can be used for that. It is only 20 dollars.

Link: <http://www.canyonsoftware.com/>

7. Contact management:

If you use the suggested email service (gmail.com), their contacts (normally used for email addresses) is quite useful for contact management. At first glance, it doesn't appear to be much more than a usual contact list, but it has the capability of adding other sections to each contact. Since all of gmail is external to your computer, you don't stand the chance of losing data if hard drive dies. You can also export your contacts to your computer in case the internet is down when you need a contact telephone number, etc.

gmail also has a calendar for event planning.

If you don't want gmail or its features, you might want to try Airset. It regularly syncs contacts (with notes) and your calendar to their online service.

Link: <http://gmail.com>

Link: <http://www.airset.com>

8. Project management:

Although I don't really have a lot of use for project management, on line project management might be useful if you are collaborating with others on a project (such as a mission team at church, visitor contact collaboration, etc). A fairly simple and free on line project management application is available through zoho.com. I have started using it as a way to keep up with church sound system projects. I had subscribe to planprojects.com to test it as well, but there appears to be a server problem at the moment.

Link: <http://projects.zoho.com/jsp/home.jsp>

Link: <http://www.planprojects.com>

(verification email hasn't shown up. perhaps server down?)

9. Accounting:

If you use accounting software, peachtree, quickbooks, quicken, etc, you probably back up to either a floppy or a usb flash drive. This is something that would be useful to encrypt and upload to your online storage area as well.

10. Alternate Free services:

Some other software applications or services that might be useful are:

fireftp a plug in for firefox that is an ftp client

If you need to keep up with your working hours, you might find myhours.com useful.

11. Encryption:

There are some excellent open source (free) software packages for encrypting files.

Some are more elaborate than others. In linux, you can individually encrypt or decrypt files using gpg. Both the software programs listed below are available for linux, windows and mac.

TrueCrypt

Link: <http://www.truecrypt.org/>

Keyparc

Link: <http://keyparc.com/web/en/>

NOTE: None of the above can be very useful if stored on your hard drive.

I've discovered that online services have provided me with the greatest backup to help me through this computer crisis. My lesson? Duplicate as much as you can in online systems. In this way, you'll have access to your data when you travel, when you have a computer crash, or when you're faced with a natural disaster.

Even when it appears that the hard drive is toast, there may be some chance to revive it -- at least long enough to capture your most important data. I will deal with that issue in a separate article, but for now, let's assume you were able to get back up and running and want to be pro-active about securing your data in the event of another crash.

Resources:

1. <http://www.siteprnews.com/2009/02/11/data-recovery-10-most-effective-computer-backup-tools/>
2. All Links listed in the Article
3. <http://www.geocities.com/thestarman3/tool/FreeTools.html>
4. <http://netsecurity.about.com/od/disasterrecovery/a/ontrackdata.htm>
5. <http://netsecurity.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ/Ya&sdn=netsecurity&zu=http%3A%2F%2Farchive.devx.com%2Fenterprise%2Farticles%2Fdrecovery%2FDRPlan%2FDRPlan-1.asp>
6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster_recovery
7. <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/306541>

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