

The
Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

www.theBDR.net

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IT OPTIONS

Ensuring Your On-Line Storage is Safe

[August 2009] "Backup! Backup! Backup!" It just cannot be said enough. The key to preventing data loss is making sure it is safely and securely backed up. But, is your data safe and secure? That is a good question to ask.

It could be as simple as your name and address book, as complex as the field data acquired during a directional antenna proof, or even all the legal details relating to a contract for the sale of a business. Losing the contents of your hard drive could represent many hours of work and possibly even irreplaceable data.

There are many options for backing up data, including secondary hard drives, network storage, external hard drives, flash drives, laptops, CD ROMs, and DVDs. Each has benefits - and liabilities. In-house storage is easier to do, especially if it is automated, but it is also subject to many of the same dangers as the original: theft, power surges, fire, flood, etc. External site storage is unlikely to be lost at the same time as the original, but requires more effort to collect and carry the data to another location.

A BETTER ALTERNATIVE?

High speed Internet connections make it possible to easily accomplish both backup and off-site transfer. Larger companies may have a server in another location, perhaps another state. More accessible to most is storage offered on Internet sites,

Internet email sites have long offered storage of email and, with a little effort, data files. Commonly, these sites offer a gigabyte or two of such storage. Additionally, a wide range of additional locations, from photo-sharing sites to sites devoted to data storage have made it easy to upload anything from your vacation pictures to business files.

The question, however, is how safe are your files?

BUT IS IT SECURE?

While you may have quite a pile of files saved somewhere on the Internet, a disturbing trend has begun in recent months – one might call it a “shaking out” of these on-line storage providers. Some big names have been involved - among them, AOL, Kodak, Hewlett-Packard, Sony and Yahoo – as well as a number of smaller firms. The result could present you with a real data pain.

According to reports, some users have lost hundreds, even thousands of pictures when sites like Digital Railroad shut down with as little as 24 hours' notice. Even if you learn of the impending shutdown, the

rush of other users trying to retrieve their files can slow, or even crash, the servers, making it hard to recover valuable files.

The problem is a common one these days: a good idea does not necessarily make a good business plan. Various sites have either run out of money or found that, as they burn through cash, there is not enough upside ahead to keep them going. Between hardware, infrastructure, support personnel, and bandwidth, it current costs around \$100 to maintain a terabyte of data. The pure storage companies seem to be in the worst situation – those who make money selling copies of photos, for example, seem to be somewhat better off.

SHOULD YOU WORRY?

So, is your data safe? Is it at risk? Has it already been lost? There is no central list of sites that are in trouble. Fortunately, the larger companies, like AOL, gave users several months' warning about closing sites like AOL Pictures.

Another tactic that is being used by those that remain is to start charging for storage. For example, one site has instituted charges of \$5 to \$20 per year, depending upon the size of the data stored. In many cases, sites post warnings about potential data loss for those who do not sign up for a pay-for-store account. Therefore, if it has been a while since you last checked your upload site, it might be a good idea to check on it from time to time.

Of course, even if your storage location seems secure, they often recommend that users keep another set of copies in a safe place. It is likely they make backups of all their users' files. But ultimately you are still the one responsible if files are lost. After all, what are you going to do if a company 3000 miles away (or on another continent) has a hard drive crash and/or disappears, along with your files? Even if they could be found, can money replace what you stored?

CHEAP ALTERNATIVES

Many stations have set up LANs that extend to the transmitter sites for the purpose of on-site Internet access or remote control, for example. If so, this is a good way to do off-site backups for key data. Some stations even have the entire day's automation mirrored this way, so that in case of trouble at the studio, operations can continue with almost no interruption.

An alternative to using your LAN to store things at the transmitter tracks the cooperative arrangements some stations have for auxiliary sites – you store their data on your system, and they reciprocate by doing the same for you.

Neither of these probably would work for your personal files. Some company policies might simply prohibit uploading of personal files. At other locations, you might find an abrupt job loss might also entail personal data loss!

Nevertheless, quid-pro-quo arrangements could work for your personal files. Just find a friend who will set you up with some storage space on a corner of his site – and then do the same for him. That should provide you both data safety at little or no cost.

GOOD PRACTICE

The best advice, then, is to consider your on-line storage as a convenience. Use it. Remember: “backup, backup, backup.” But then “periodically make a second copy” and put it somewhere else.

Here is the bottom line: along with on-line storage, a CD, DVD, or external hard drive with your business records or your family's pictures and history placed in a safety deposit box will go a long way toward preventing a catastrophic loss.

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