

## **Backing it up! – The safe strategy.**

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As a computer consultant in the field, I see just about everything. From viruses and spyware to completely failed systems.

The repair might be something simple to a complete system rebuild; however, I always ask the same question before I begin any type of repair.

“When was the last time you backed up?”

Most of my first time customers do not have a current backup and almost two-thirds do not have any sort of backup in case their data is lost. Those are some scary statistics, and usually bad news to the customer if something serious has happened to their computer and their un-retrievable data.

First, let us look at the definition of a backup in computer terminology. A backup is a second copy of critical computer files. A backup is the archival of important data should your computer system crash.

With that definition in mind, think about what should be backed up. Important stuff like documents, digital pictures and music files are what people usually answer. They are right to a point. There is probably a little more to back up than most people realize. Many people use personal finance programs on their computers like QuickBooks and Quicken. The data that those programs create should be backed up on a regular basis. Also important email, address books, and your web browsers favorites should be backed up now and then just in case disaster strikes. Remember if you created it and the data gets lost somehow; ask yourself how hard it will be to recreate that information. Some data won't be able to be recreated at all, like digital pictures taken on a once in a lifetime vacation. If they are lost without a backup, they are gone.

The reasons “why” to backup are obvious to some people, but I must stress that accidental deletion is still the number one reason people lose their files followed closely by hard drive failure and viruses.

Now that we have answered the “What” to back up and “Why” you should backup, let us get to the important stuff. “How” to back up.

There are a lot of methods. Some people copy the files or “Burn” them to Blank CDs or DVD’s provided they have a computer and software capable of doing so, while others buy those tiny USB flash drives. Other alternatives are external USB hard drives and web sites that exist on the Internet that let users back up their personal files. (The last being a fairly new trend that the younger crowd has taken to adopting to.)

Regardless of the method you use, any type of backup is better than no backup at all. The frequency of the backup is up to the personal preference of the individual. Remember, once you have something backed up, you only have to backup the things you changed or added to your computer since your last backup. Some backups like pictures can be organized by dates and events and backed up once while your financial programs should be backed up more frequently since you are always changing the same file.

Last, but equally important, your backups should be stored in a safe place away from the computer and sometimes in another physical location altogether. Accidents can and do happen. It is all about how important your data is to you. Backing it up is only half the solution. Having it stored somewhere safe and available if needed is what really counts. Now that’s what I call a safe strategy!

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