

Backups; what are they and why should I care?

Many people use antivirus software to protect their computers but this simply is not enough protection. Personal computers are at great risk, and people that do not backup their computers can lose everything, all it takes is a simple virus attack that gets through, a mechanical failure, a few mistaken key strokes, or theft, and everything that you store on your computer can be gone.

Lost data can usually be recovered, even deleted and damaged files. However this can get expensive, if the drive is mechanically damaged “broken” rather than being infected with a virus or accidentally deleted, then the repair will jump from hundreds of dollars to over a thousand \$\$\$.

I deal with broken computers on a daily basis, and most of these computers are not backed up. When I ask why, the client usually says something like, “*my computer was working fine yesterday, so I thought it would fine today as well*”. Now all these people know that computers are completely unreliable for long-term storage.

Simply put, a backup means 2. Sounds obvious but many people think that burning pictures to a CD then clearing them off the computer is considered a backup. Some people will also copy important files from one folder to another folder in their computer and call that a backup. Neither of these approaches are safe. In order to safeguard your pictures and other files, they need to be duplicated somewhere outside of the computer.

What to Backup

The problem is that it's difficult to know what to backup. Unless you're very familiar with computers, and you have a lot of spare time, you should always use an automated system that backs up everything for you.

A complete automatic backup will allow you to fairly quickly restore everything when things go wrong. Even the Windows operating system can be backed up, but that's another story (cloning), for today we're just talking about saving all your personal files. If you manually copy folders and files to a CD or flash drive, I can almost guarantee you that at least one file you wish you had backed up will be missed and lost forever.

The most important files to backup are your documents, pictures, music, and other user files, but they are not the only files that you need to backup. Let's walk through some of them.

- **Documents:** You should backup your entire documents folder all the time. This should be a no-brainer.
- **Music:** If you've paid lots of money for MP3 downloads, you'll probably be sad to lose them. Make sure to include this folder. *Note:* if you're an iTunes user, you should make sure to backup your iTunes folder, which is thankfully usually inside this directory.
- **Pictures & Videos:** It's really sad when I get emails from people saying their hard drive died and they lost all their pictures of their family. The photos might not have actually costed you anything, but you'll probably be more sad about losing memories than paying for music downloads again.
- **Desktop Email:** If you're using Outlook or Windows Live Mail, make absolutely certain that you've backed up the files from these applications. Email is usually stored in the AppData folder which is normally hidden (invisible)
- **Application Settings:** If you look within the AppData folders, you'll see directories for each and every application you're running. These settings can often be restored from a backup so you don't have to tweak everything again. Just head into C:\Users\Username\AppData\ to see the Local, Roaming, and LocalLow folders that contain many settings for your applications.

- **Bookmarks:** Most browsers other than Internet Explorer actually make it difficult to backup your bookmarks using Windows Backup, but the much better option is to sync your bookmarks to the cloud. If you'd rather use local backup, you can simply backup the application settings folder and restore that—this works especially well for Firefox in our experience.

There is an easier way!

Instead of trying to find all those locations, backup your entire Users folder, which is at C:\Users\Username in Windows 7 or Vista, and C:\Documents and Settings\Username for Windows XP. Remember that these folders are normally hidden, so you will have to un-hide them first.

Files You Should Not Bother Backing Up

There's simply no reason to backup these directories:

- **Windows:** There's almost never a reason to backup your Windows directory, as you're going to have to reinstall the whole thing anyway, so this backup will likely do you no good.
- **Program Files:** You're going to have to reinstall your applications if your computer dies and you have to reinstall. Why bother backing up all these files?

It's worth noting that if you create a system image backup (cloning), you won't have to reinstall all of your applications, and backing up these folders would be pointless.

Cloning can save several hours of reinstalling programs after a hard drive failure.

Why Don't People Regularly Back Up

There are many reasons why people do not regularly back up their computers. One of the top reasons is the lack of a simple easy to use solution that can be automatically set up without needing any real computer technical knowledge, and one that effortlessly backs up computers regularly. That is where **Clickfree** Automatic Backup comes in – there is no easier solution available anywhere in the world for protecting the photos, music and data files saved on personal computers.

You can and should use flash drives (memory sticks) as well. These are especially useful for smaller backups like documents and financial files (QuickBooks, Simply Accounting). These little gadgets are cheap and easy to use (\$20 - \$60), however they can't take the place of a complete automatic backup device (portable hard-drive). The **Clickfree** devices are range in price according to their size and feature list (\$80 - \$200).

Thanks for taking the time to read this article, please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have and for current pricing for the backup device plus setup and a simple demonstration of how it works.

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