

This week's article will help you find the best way to backup your data.

We all have lots of important data we are hanging on to such as digital audio and photo files, videos, documents, presentations, PDFs, spreadsheets, old email, mailing lists, and favorite website links. In addition, there can be application data such as newsletter or greeting card files, special fonts, clipart and animations, checkbook, accounting or general ledger data, or programming source code. For some of us the list could be all this and much more. What do is the best and most effective backup method for each of these data types. There are several types from which you can choose.

For those home users that do not generate a large amount of data, you may be able to use your computer's CD-RW (read-write) player to back up your data. This media is handy to use but the discs are easily scratched if you're not careful. Make sure you test the CDs after you create them to make sure they are readable. And handle them with care - immediately put them into their protective case with good informational labeling so you can find your data when you need it.

CD-RW media is a good choice for email, word-processing documents, PDFs, presentation files, music, and small spreadsheets or accounting files. You may wish to group your files by project, year or file type. The choice is yours as long as you know how to find your data later. CD-RW will work for digital photos, but a recordable DVD-RW is better for high-pixel digital pictures that take up much more space.

Flash drives are convenient thumb-sized portable storage devices that are handy for a quick backup of data files and folders. Flash drives are perfect for checkbook accounting file backups or transferring files between PCs and laptops, or when you need to have files with you when you travel. Even though some flash drives hold a significant amount of data, they are small in size, making them easy to lose, hard to label, and most don't hold enough data for a full hard drive backup.

An external hard drive may be the best backup strategy. Prices have dropped, making these devices affordable for the home user. External hard drives are self-contained hard drives that connect to your computer using your USB port. Most external hard drives have a large capacity and are fast and flexible. These drives can be as small as a deck of cards, which is convenient enough to allow off-site storage, a good idea for small businesses. You can purchase an external hard drive with enough capacity to copy and back up multiple home computers or a small business. This is a strategy that can be ideal for individuals, businesses and families who create large amounts of data.

Whatever strategy you use to backup and archive your data, make sure you select modern up-to-date media and backup devices that fit the value you place on the data you're protecting. Make sure you can label and retrieve your data

files easily for transfer to new hardware or for safe storage for many years to come.

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