Computer Bytes – Backups 2017

By: Harv Oliver

Happy Summer! This recent cooler spell has been awesome. I hope you're all enjoying the summer as I am.

For those of you that read my updates routinely, you've noticed that I end each with "Until next time, don't forget your backups!". It's been a while since I've hit on this subject specifcally and since it's so important, have chosen to share/revisit my thoughts with you on BACKUPS this time around.

When I first became involved with computers back in 1989 it was as a BACKUP OPERATOR for the mainframe systems at the DOD Engineering Contractor I worked for. At the time, I would spend 5-6 hours each night, after normal business hours, performing backups manually to the reel 'magnetic tapes' (think an old-fashioned movie reel). We backed up 2, 512Mb drives for the entire company. Yes, this is no typo. For those of you not seeing the 'history humor' of this, most personal computer drives today come with a 1Tb hard drive which is roughly 1000000 Mb. In any event, I cut my teeth on, and to this day, consider backups the most prominent task in computer support.

If you don't have a backup, you risk losing your data... permanently. It's not a matter of IF you'll lose your data, it's a matter of WHEN. Loss of data happens in many ways. The most common cause is physical failure of the hard drive that stores your data. Or perhaps you get one of the rampant "Ransomware" bugs that lock your files and want $ for recovery. Often when these events occur and clients call me to help, if you do not have a backup, I commonly use the term "the magic wand is in the shop". I cannot help recover what is not there...

So – let's remedy not having or ensuring your current backups are operating properly and meeting your needs.

WHAT TO BACK UP. Keep in mind you can always purchase and/or reload an APPLICATION, i.e. MSWord, something of that nature. DATA that you've created is yours uniquely and yours alone. I often ask the real question; would you be bummed or cry if this were lost?! Being more specific you would of course want to save Documents (letters, spreadsheets, etc.), Accounting, Pictures, Music, Videos, etc. ANYTHING you would not want to lose.

A good way to simplify backing up is to store all your data on your computer in one place. A good example is the "Documents" folder. Whenever you create a new directory or a new file, like a Microsoft Word document, you save under the "Documents" folder structure. THEN when you back up, if you choose "Documents", EVERYTHING under it will back up! Same for Pictures, Music, etc.

BACKUP TYPES. Windows 10 has a feature called File History. This will actively back up what you select. Windows10 also includes the Windows7 Backup Utility, included in Windows7 as well, which can create a system image and run automatic/scheduled backups. For Apple users the Operating System includes the backup utility "Time Machine". There are also third party backup software products with more enhanced features which are generally used for Business backups. Truthfully, the Windows backups are pretty solid for most users. Keep in mind you must use the same backup tool to "Restore" that the Backup was created with.

Additionally, a hot backup option nowadays are "online" or "cloud" backups such as Carbonite. These perform "automatically" and store your information to the specific vendors Servers at their location. I like this as a "disaster recovery" option. Should your backup hardware be stolen or damaged, you can restore your info from these offsite locations. I still recommend a local drive for most usages as they are much more efficient for normal recovery.

BACKUP LOCATIONS. As shared above the "cloud" backups store offsite to vendor Servers. For local backups you can use DVD drives to backup. This is now considered a less efficient option as you have to swap them more often and they don't hold as much data. I recommend using a USB Flash drive, or for FULL backups of larger quantity, an External Backup USB Drive (I love the WD Passport – only a USB cord/no power adapter to mess with). You can set up the software portion of your backup and run manually whenever you feel it important to do so, OR, to automatically go to the backup device on a schedule, overwrite, etc. If you really want to be secure, buy 2 matching external devices and swap them weekly keeping a good backup in a different secure location for recovery. LASTLY – periodically check your backups! Just because we help you or you set them up previously, "life happens". They might have become corrupted or not running. Nothing worse than thinking you have a backup then not being able to recover from it. Obviously there are more details and options regarding backups and restores but this is a solid general overview to get you on your way.

NOTE: Our sharing of information within articles includes suggestions and tips. USE AND/OR APPLY AT YOUR OWN RISK. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our offices for professional service/guidance.

Until next time, don't forget your backups! For more information, contact Harv Oliver, HANDS-ON Consultations, (805) 524-5278, www.hocsupport.com