



Series 6 – How Do I Backup my Important Files?

Welcome back to a series of computer related articles brought to you by VistaSol Computer Solutions. Over the coming weeks we are going to be featuring articles based on the theme of 'How do I . . .?'

This week we're starting a new series of articles on the subject of 'How Do I backup my Data', to this end we'll offering some practical advice on the whys and wherefores of backing up your data.

Part 1 – What are Backups?

Fact: You'll only ever need a backup when you haven't got one!

"A backup, or the process of backing up, is the act of making copies of data which may be used to *restore* the original after a data loss event".

In other words: "getting your stuff back after a system crash!"

Digital Capture Devices

We live in a technological age where there are so many digital devices available to us – we almost take them for granted. Mobile phones, iPods, iPads, iPhones, digital cameras, notebooks, netbooks, tablet PCs, desktop PCs – we've all got at least one of these devices, and we all use them as a means of capturing and / or storing everyday digital events in our lives.

What we need to consider right now is how important this digital data is, and how much hardship it would cause if we lost it.

Type of Backups

I'm guessing that most of you will follow a similar routine; i.e. you use your desktop PC or notebook (laptop) as a means of general storage for any data you may create from any of your 'digital capture devices'. This will probably include any one or more of the following activities:

1. Copying photos etc from mobile phones/digital cameras to the PC (desktop or notebook)
2. Downloading attachments from emails (photos, jokes, documents etc)

3. Saving copies of documents you have created with your preferred word processor, or spreadsheet application
4. Storing audio (music) content using iTunes (or similar product)
5. Storing video (movies) content using iTunes (or similar product)
6. Downloading programs from the internet
7. Downloading other forms of audio/video media content from the internet

Whether you are conscious of this or not, this is your first step to making backups – you're copying various forms of data from one (or more) device to a personal or household computer. The fact that you are 'saving it' on the household computer means that this content is important to someone. Therefore, you should be considering some form of disaster recovery solution i.e. how you can save that important information in the event of a catastrophic event which may deny access to this information at some time in the future.

What we are trying to avoid is a single point of failure i.e. the household computer, and to think about spreading any risk to other storage devices.

Backup Media

Before you begin to think about any backup strategy, you first need to think about how and where you are going to store it. You'll need to calculate how much data you have stored on your computer, and how much of that data you would prefer not to lose in the event of a major catastrophe.

These storage / file size comparisons may help when considering your backup media:

1GB (Giga Byte) = 1000MBs (Mega Byte), 2GB = 2000MBs, etc, etc

A single high resolution photo from a 10 megapixel digital camera = 4MBs (approx)
Using this as an example, you would be able to store about 250 photos on a 1GB USB drive or 500 photos on a 2GB drive.

A single audio mp3 file = approx 3-5MBs
A music album (of mp3s) = approx 150-200MBs

DVD/CDs

If the only things you have stored on your computer are a few photographs and documents, then you can probably get away with 'burning' these to a CD or DVD.

1xCD = 700MB
1xDVD = 4700MB (4.7GB)

USB Flash Drives

If you do not have access to a DVD writer or blank DVDs, you may wish to consider investing in a 'USB Flash Drive'. These USB drives are much more practical than DVDs and easier to carry around in your pocket, handbag etc. You may also wish to

consider USB drives if you have a moderate amount of data e.g. photos, music, videos etc.

USB drives are available in a range of sizes: 1GB, 2GBs, 4GBs, 8GBs, 16GBs and 32GBs. The size you buy will depend on what you can afford and how much data you need to backup.

External Hard Disk Drives

If you have a lot of data i.e. in excess of 16GB, you may wish to consider investing in an external hard disk drive. These are also available in a variety of sizes ranging from 80GBs to 2TBs (1TB (Terra Byte) = 1000GBs, 2TB = 2000GBs). Some of these external hard disk drives include backup software which will automatically backup your data whenever the drive is plugged into a USB port on your computer.

Cloud Storage

This is another storage solution which is becoming more and more popular - especially as there are some free services being offered (limited in most cases to just 2GB). This storage option requires access to a broadband internet connection in order to transfer data between your computer devices and the internet based storage systems. The benefits are that this data can be made accessible to any device wherever you may be in the world; there are also applications available to allow you to share this data with mobile phones etc. The most widely used cloud based storage solution is provided by a company called 'DropBox' – you can find out more about this storage solution using this link:

<http://www.dropbox.com/>

Next week, we'll discuss what types of backup software are available, and which of these may be best suited to your needs.