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Topic: Backup Fundamentals

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What is backing up?. This basically means creating a copy of the data on your hard drive and putting it on another medium. Something that very few home users do.

The data on your computer is only as safe as your last backup. Hardware failure, accidental deletion, theft, children, storm related damage, viruses or power surges (to name the most common) can render your data inaccessible.

To avoid data loss you need to backup any important information to a medium that can be removed from the computer and stored separately. Typically this will take the form of floppy disks, tapes or CD's. Other methods involve network drives or DVD's, even uploading to the Internet. Whatever works for you – as long as your data is copied and kept in a safe area.

Currently, the most convenient and cheapest method would be using recordable CD's (CD-R or CD-RW). A CD burner can be bought for roughly \$80 and the disks cost around \$1 each and can hold approximately 700 megabytes, which equates to about 500 floppy disks.

Whether you do daily, weekly or monthly backups will depend on how critical you determine your data to be. Think about the age of the backed-up data that may need to be restored. Can you accept data from a month ago or would a week or a day be more acceptable?.

Also consider keeping a copy of your data offsite. It's no good doing backups and keeping the disks beside your computer only to have the office burn down and have the computer and backups destroyed. Try keeping a set of backups onsite for easy access if you need to retrieve some lost data and also keep another copy in a remote site, separate to the computer location.

It is also a good idea to have a rotating set of backup volumes. By this I mean don't keep backing up to the same disks every time. Have different sets and label them Week 1, Week 2 or January, February or Monday, Tuesday. Imagine the scenario: you discover a file has been accidentally deleted. No problems – just look for the file in the latest backup. You then realise the file has been deleted for some time and is not on the backup disks. Having multiple sets gives you the option to go back to a previous backup that spans a greater time frame, hopefully to when the file was still around and had been included in a backup.

Typically, you should be backing up any data that you have created, or that cannot be recovered from the original installation CD's. For example, you should at least include any emails, the address book, My Document folder, and any 3rd party software data like MYOB. There is no need to backup the Windows directory or programs like Word as these can simply be reinstalled.

Backups form part of your safety net. When things turn pear shaped, your backups are going to save your bacon.

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