

President's Corner: January, 2015

Backups

By Eric Moore

I was lucky when my Windows 7 computer wouldn't boot one day. Lucky that is because, it was not my primary computer. I do most of my work—reading email, composing articles for CUGG, maintaining my finances, surfing the Internet—on my laptop, so there weren't any critical files that I could lose.

I am always concerned about losing important data, so I regularly back up my important files from my laptop to an external hard drive using a free Microsoft program called SyncToy. SyncToy is not a backup utility as such, but is useful for the purpose of copying folders and files between two drives. The two folders to be used in a SyncToy task are referred to as “left” and “right.” Different copy actions are available in SyncToy:

- **Synchronize:** All changes including file renames and deletions are mirrored between the two folders. The end result is that the two folders are identical after running SyncToy.
- **Echo:** All changes including file renames and deletions are replicated from the left folder to the right folder, but changes in the right folder are not replicated in the left folder.
- **Contribute:** Any file changes and renames are replicated from the left folder to the right folder, but file deletions are not replicated.

I primarily use the Echo option to copy my documents to my external hard drive. It is quick and easy to do, and it protects me against data loss should my laptop crash or the hard drive ceases operating.

Admittedly, there are two things I have not been good about for a few years. The first is to ensure I have multiple backups of my important files. Making multiple copies of the same backup on different media is important in case one device, whether an external hard drive, flash drive, CD, or DVD should fail. Every storage device will eventually fail, so it is best not to rely on only one. Regularly testing your backups, to ensure you can copy the data from them back to your computer, is also important. If a device is failing, then the sooner you copy your data to a new device, the better. In my case, I have another external hard drive to which I should regularly copy my laptop backup. This would better protect me in the event that my primary backup drive should fail.

The second important thing about backups is to ensure at least one copy is stored off-site. What this means, that in the event of fire, flood, or burglary, it is important to store at least one backup of your data at another location. Possible off-site locations include your office, a safe deposit box, or an online backup service such as Carbonite, Dropbox, and Mozy. Online backup services are useful if you have a fairly small quantity of data to back up, or if you have high-speed Internet. They also don't require that you leave home to back up your data. They may be risky, though, for a few reasons:

- If the backup service should go out of business, will you lose your data?
- Can you be certain that your data is encrypted to ensure the vendor, hackers, and government snoops cannot access your secrets?
- Will the vendor be able to help if something goes wrong, say if your backup becomes corrupted?

I do not have any experiences with online backup services, so I do not have any particular recommendations as to which are safe and trustworthy. However, you may find useful reviews of different services on websites such as [PC Magazine](#) and [PC World](#). Your friends, family, and fellow members with CUGG many also be of help in giving you recommendations.

One other important consideration is regularity. The more often your files are backed up, the safer you will be. A good backup program/service should have an option to be scheduled to run regularly, so as to eliminate the human error factor (forgetfulness) that can prevent your data from being backed up at regular intervals.

A number of presentations on backups have been given by CUGG members in the past. You will find links to useful files on the CUGG Presentations page, under the section heading *Backups and Data Recovery*. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask at one of our meetings, at Don Wiegel's monthly SIG, or by sending an email to our members email group.

Now that I've written this article, I need to back it up. :-)