Safeguarding Computer and Phone Data

By PeteTarka

Computers have become a vital part of our daily routine. From storing personal financial records to vacation photos, our computers hold information that is near and dear to all of us. If your desktop computer were to crash or your laptop got stolen, would you find yourself worrying about the several hundred dollars in hardware you just lost or would you find yourself frantically retracing all the information that you had stored on that device, fearful that it would be forever lost?

Although very inconvenient, and a loss of a few hundred dollars, very few times do we worry about the physical hardware but rather the data that was stored on that device. For millions of individuals this very preventable loss of data can be avoided simply by formulating a sound data backup strategy and enforcing a data encryption plan. This would ensure that even if your hardware has crashed, or your device is lost or stolen, the data is safe and restorable.

Here are a couple of solutions to help keep your computer data safe and encrypted.

For Windows Computers

FBackup
FBackup (www.fbackup.com) is a free software which allows you to take specific folders on your computer and create backup copies of them to a destination storage device (cloud storage, hard drive, RAID5, etc.). Documentation and installation instructions are on their website.

Keep in mind the destination device you choose to backup to will dictate your behavior. For example, if you backup to an external hard drive you will want to be certain that your hard drive, once it contains your most current backup, is taken off-premise. That way, if a fire engulfs your office and computer equipment, the newly backed-up drive is not a victim also.

If you choose to back up to a cloud-based[1] service such as justcloud.com, dropbox.com, or any of a wide host of other cloud-based storage solutions, you will have access to your files anywhere and anytime you have an active Internet connection. The flip side is that some server

---

[1] Cloud storage is a model of data storage where the digital data is stored in logical pools, the physical storage spans multiple servers (and often locations), and the physical environment is typically owned and managed by a hosting company.

in a non-descript underground bunker somewhere in the world will have a copy of your financial records, personal data, etc. stored on their hard drives.

You'll want to consider the pros and cons to determine which device best serves your needs as both an individual and an organization for data storage.

AxCrypt
Now that you have your files and folders backed up, you may want to consider locking them under a virtual lock and key. AxCrypt (http://www.axantum.com/axcrypt/) encrypts your files and folders and renders them useless to prying individuals in the event you lose your laptop. Encrypting desktop files and folders may also be necessary if you work in a shared or common workspace instead of a secure office environment.

AxCrypt is also free software and has plenty of documentation on how to install, configure, and effectively use the software to protect your data. AxCrypt is currently only available for Windows operating systems.

For Apple Computers
Time Machine
Time Machine is included in the Mac operating system 10.5 and newer. You can use this software to make complete backups of your computer or you can specify certain folders. It also allows you to backup to a local external hard drive (via USB, ThunderBolt, or FireWire) or a network drive that is compatible with Time Machine.

Once you set your system to backup with Time Machine, it will back up automatically every hour as long as the backup disk is available.

FileVault
FileVault is also built into the Mac operating system. With FileVault you can encrypt the contents of your entire hard drive to help keep your data secure. For more information about setting up FileVault go to http://support.apple.com/en-us/HT4790.

For iPhone/iPad
Backup Options
While we understand the importance of backing up our data on our computers and laptops, we also want to get into the habit of backing up your iPhone or iPad on a regular basis to minimize the risk of losing important pictures, videos, notes, etc.

There are two ways to backup your iDevice.

1. You can use your iCloud account to backup 5GB of data for free (additional data storage is available for a fee). To set this up, go to Settings/iCloud/Backup and turn it on.
2. You can backup an unlimited amount of data from your iDevice to your computer using iTunes. Connect your iDevice to your computer using the USB sync cable. Launch iTunes and select your iPhone or iPad in the bar at the top of the window. Select "Back Up Now" in the center window and iTunes will make a backup of the contents of your iDevice.

Be sure to password protect your iDevice, so that if it gets lost or stolen, it will be difficult for others to retrieve your personal data.

About the Author:

Pete Tarka manages the IT Customer Care Department at the AG National Leadership and Resource Center. He has served the IT needs of the national office for over 12 years. If you have any questions about this article, you can reach Pete at ptarka@ag.org.