

Article: [COMPUTERS BEHAVING BADLY](#)

Topic: Backup Mediums

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I come across a lot of clients who have lost irreplaceable data from their PC's. For those of you who backup, I am going to talk about some of the options available and some of the pitfalls to watch out for.

Firstly you have the choice of using CD's, hard drives or USB memory sticks. These make up the majority of conventional, cheap backup mediums. Floppy disks are excluded here due to their small storage size but are still useful if the amount of data to store is small.

Next you have to know how much storage space will be sufficient. This space is measured in megabytes. As a rule of thumb, a typed, A4 sheet of paper holds 1000 bytes, or 1 kilobytes (kb). 1000kb equals 1 megabyte (mb) and 1000mb equals 1 gigabyte (gb). Confused?.

Optical storage (CD's and DVD's), can hold 700mb on a CD and 5000mb or 5gig on a DVD. These two types come in either Recordable or Rewriteable formats. The recordables can be written to only once. When a portion of the disk has been used or 'burnt' as it's called, it cannot be re-burnt. The disk can be written to again until it is closed (or finalised) or becomes full. With a rewriteable disk, the unit can be written to, erased or overwritten numerous times.

Be aware that CD-RW's and DVD-RW's (rewriteables) can sometimes not be recognised by other CD/DVD players. They will definitely be able to be read by the unit that made them but may fail to be read by others. Considering the fact that reason you are backing up is because your PC will die and you will need to take the backups to another PC to restore your data, it would be frustrating to learn your backups are useless.

Be aware that the blank CD's you buy for burning have a layer of dye that is 'burnt' by the laser to record your data. This dye can 'rot'. Due to humidity, sunlight or scratches some only have a life span of 6 months with 2 years being the average. These differ from the CD's you buy with software already on them have been 'pressed' onto a metallic layer. These can virtually last a lifetime.

Magnetic storage devices are hard drives. The best option for backing up is to have an external one. These can plug into a USB port and can travel between PC's and destinations. You can buy them ready to use from most electronic retailers but they tend to be costly. To make your own, get a laptop hard drive and an aluminium enclosure at any computer store.

Hard drives have been around for years with basically no change except for storage capacity and speed. As long as you don't drop them, they are extremely reliable. But like any mechanical device, they will eventually suffer a failure.

USB memory or flash cards are becoming very popular now. Their storage capacity versus their cost can still be prohibitive. They are best suited to transferring data to and from work, school, Uni and between PC's. They are very portable and convenient but may not have enough storage to backup all your personal folders.

As you can see, there is no one ideal solution and each one has its downsides. Personally, I use a combination of the above. It simply comes down to what importance you place on your data and how much time you can afford to recover from a failure.

So – backup now and backup often !!!

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