

Published in The Hudson Independent, March 2014

Tech Stuff

By Craig Vogel, Chief Technologist @ myComputerGuy, inc.

Welcome back to “tech stuff”. I hope you found January’s “security” briefing helpful and informative. I know I said that we’d talk about email and downtime next but after last month’s column, I’ve been asked to go into more detail about backups. Like I said last time, I think its critical to keep educating everyone about topics like this. I’m convinced that backup is the most important maintenance task you can do for your computer.

Why Backup?

Family pictures. Important documents. Financial data. These are the types of information you have stored on your computer. For most people, loss of this information would be catastrophic. What would you do if your computer experiences a system failure, hard drive crash or malware attack that causes loss of access to these files? What about something as simple as deleting a file by mistake – how would you recover? The answer is not “I don’t know” or “I’d call someone like you” – the only answer is “I’d restore from my backup”.

Backup Systems Pros and Cons

So how do you setup a backup system and what kind of system works best? Let’s answer the second question first. The best kind of backup system is one that is completely automatic, simple to restore from and simple to manage. In addition, you want as few “moving parts” as possible. By this I mean, the minimal amount of hardware and software you’ll need to maintain to keep your solution up and running.

Though there are as many as five different kinds of backup systems, in my experience there are two that work best – *local* and *online* (nowadays referred to as “cloud”). **A local backup system** is one where the copy of your important files is physically located in the same place as your computer. This is good for performance (the information doesn’t have far to travel) and access (the storage medium, usually an external hard drive, can be physically handled) but bad for security (easy access means easy damage or theft) and disaster recovery (if you have a flood or a fire, you could lose your backup as well as your computer). Other pros and cons: this method is typically easy to setup (local backup software is built into PC and Mac computers) and inexpensive (hard drive storage is cheap) but you have to worry about the drive being properly powered, connected and working so the management overhead is an issue. Due to the negatives of the local backup system, I typically recommend an online backup system.

An online backup system is one where the copy of your important files is NOT located in the same place as your computer. This is achieved by UPLOADING your files to a server on the Internet. This is bad for performance (initially ONLY, since the first backup requires that ALL your files be sent to the server; subsequent backups happen MUCH faster) and access (you can’t physically touch your backup) but good for security (all your information is encrypted aka scrambled) and disaster proof (since the information isn’t at your location). Other pros and cons: this method is also easy to setup (sign up and pay, install and configure) and mostly

foolproof (“set it and forget it” – because there’s no hardware to manage) but the cost is recurring (based on a monthly fee that gets discounted if you sign up for a year or two years). Regardless of the system you choose, I urge everyone to CHECK his or her backup system from time to time to ensure it is functioning properly.

Products and Recommendations

Local backup systems have two components: hardware and software. Online backup systems are software only. As previously mentioned, both PC and Mac computers come with built in backup software (Windows Backup and Time Machine respectively). For hardware, I’m partial to external hard drives made by Seagate and LaCie. My preferred online backup system is called Mozy. I am not a fan of their primary competitor Carbonite.

One more thing to consider: the hybrid strategy. Even though I prefer online to local, the *combination* of the two systems is very powerful. The access and availability of local with the security and safety of online is the best of both worlds. And Mozy for Windows provides a feature that enables this – they call it “2xProtect”. The software does both online and local backup simultaneously. To accomplish this on a Mac, simply use both Time Machine and Mozy.

I hope you found this information valuable. Please email me at craig@mycomputerguy-inc.com if you have something specific you would like me to address. To be continued...

Craig Vogel is President and Chief Technologist of myComputerGuy, inc., a small business and consumer IT consulting firm based in Irvington. Since 2002, Craig and myComputerGuy have been making IT simple, providing 25 years of experience and expertise to clients in the river towns, Westchester and Manhattan.