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Backing Up Your Data Why and How

What would you do if one day you turned on your computer and your hard drive refused to work anymore, your files gone for good? What if a virus attacked your computer and erased all the files on your hard drive, including the manuscript you had been working on for the last year. These and other scenarios can wipe out all your hard work in a matter of minutes.

- Do you have word processing documents you could not live without?
- Do you have an e-mail address book or a list a favorite places on the web that would be very hard to recreate?
- Do you need to save your e-mail messages for future reference?
- Do you keep track of your finances in Quicken or Microsoft Money?

There are many reasons why we need to backup our data on our computers. We never know when a hard drive will stop spinning (Hard drives spin at 4000 to 7000 rpm and are one of the only moving parts in a computer.) or when a virus might attack the data on it. This past summer I had to completely reformat and reinstall all the software on two computers and physically replace the hard drives on three others.

It even happens to me! One day in August I turned on my computer and nothing happened. The hard drive refused to work and *it was only five months old*. Luckily I had a complete backup of my hard drive that was five months old and a backup of my data that was only a few days old. It still took quite a bit of work but at least I was able to get up and running again without having to recreate my data.

How To Backup

There are five methods to backup your data for safe keeping. Each method has it's own pros and cons of time, ease of use and cost.

- [Floppy Disk Backups](#)
- [Zip Drive Backups](#)
- [Tape Drive Backups](#)
- [CD-Writer Drive Backups](#)

"Always keep a set of backup disks off site. Then if fire or theft strikes you will still have a copy of your data."

- 
- [Online Backups](#)

Sometimes it is hard to decide which backup method is right for you. With some consultation we can decide together which method would give you the best protection for your situation. Click [Next](#) below to find out more about each method or click on the method above you are interested in to jump to that one.

If disaster were to strike, using one of these methods to backup your data should help minimize the frustration and aggravation of having to restore your computer.

And always remember:

"Save early, save often and always backup your data."

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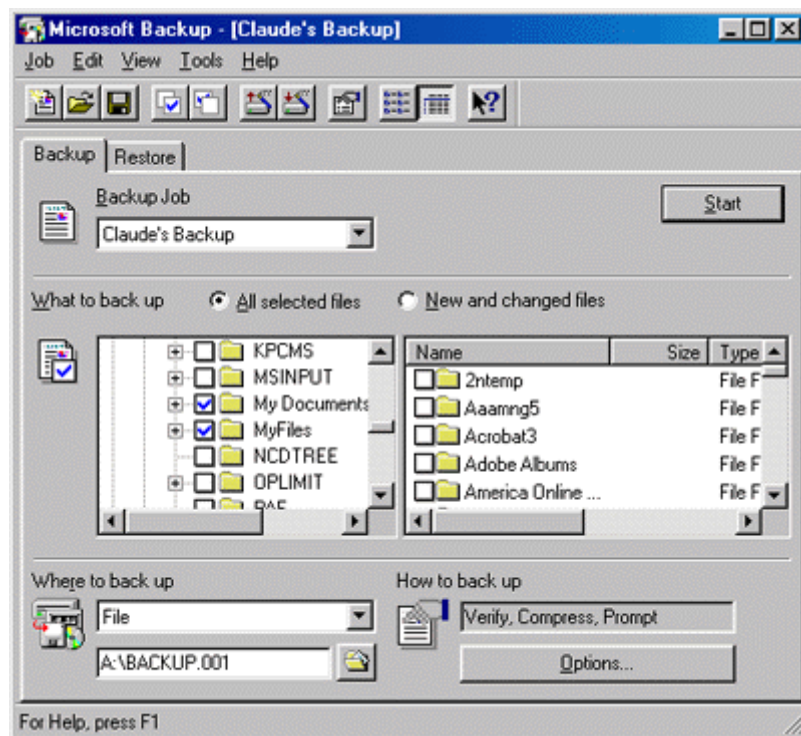
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Floppy Disk Backups

Floppy disks have been around since the beginning of Personal Computers. First they were flexible 5¼ inch disks (thus the name floppy) and now they are mostly 3½ inch disks in hard plastic cases. Each floppy disk holds only 1.44 [megabytes](#) of information. You would not want to backup your entire hard drive on floppy disks. They are good only for backing up small amounts of data. On the other hand, they are inexpensive (approx. 50¢ each) and readily available.

Windows 95 & 98 comes with the Microsoft Backup program so there is no need to purchase anything else except a box of floppy disks. It is found under Start/Programs/Accessories/System Tools/Backup.



In Microsoft Backup you specify "What to back up" (Check the Folders and/or files, in this example the "My Documents" and "MyFiles" folders will be backed up.) and "Where to back up" (A:\Backup.001 means create a backup file called Backup.001 on the floppy drive). After you finish specifying what to backup you can save the Backup Job for future use. (I have called it "Claude's Backup".)

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ZIP Drive Backups

My favorite way to backup data is with a Zip drive. Zip drives are fast and easy to use. They are made by [omega](#) and come in 100 and 250 [megabyte](#) capacities. Because of their relatively small capacity they are not designed for complete backups of your entire hard drive. Use them to backup only your data quickly and easily. Also, Zip drives have also been around for many years and are widely used making it easier to transfer large files from one computer to another.



Zip drives can be installed internally (placed in an open drive bay inside your computer) or externally (connected to your computer by a parallel or USB port). If your computer has the room for an internal drive they save desk space and do not need a separate plug. On the other hand if you want to use the drive with more than one computer get an External model.

Zip drives come with their own backup software which will let you specify what files you want to backup.

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Tape Drive Backups

Tape backup drives have been around almost as long as Floppy Disks. The major benefit of tape is that it holds a lot of data on a single tape. The downside is that tape drives are slower than the other methods.



Internal



External

Like Zip drives, Tape drives can be installed internally (placed in an open drive bay inside your computer) or externally (connected to your computer by a parallel or USB port). These drives come in many different capacities. Try to match the capacity with the size of your hard drive. Then if you decide to do a complete backup of your entire hard drive you will be able to fit it on one tape making unattended backups easy. On the other hand if all you want to backup is your important data then a smaller capacity drive will suit your needs.

Tape backup drives all come with their own backup software. The software will let you specify whether you want to backup your entire hard drive or choose just the data files.

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CD-Writer Drive Backups

For years we could only read from CD-ROM's (Compact Disk, Read Only Memory). In the last few years we can now create our own CD's with CD-Writer drives. Each CD holds 650 [megabytes](#) so they can be used to backup an entire hard drive, but not without a time expense. If your hard drive is very large you will still have to sit by your computer and swap in and out CD's to perform a complete backup.

These drives use two kinds of CD's. One kind is called CD-R's which you can save to only once. When the CD is full, that's it. The second CD's are called CD-RW's. These disks can be used over and over just like a floppy or Zip disk although they are a bit more expensive.



Internal

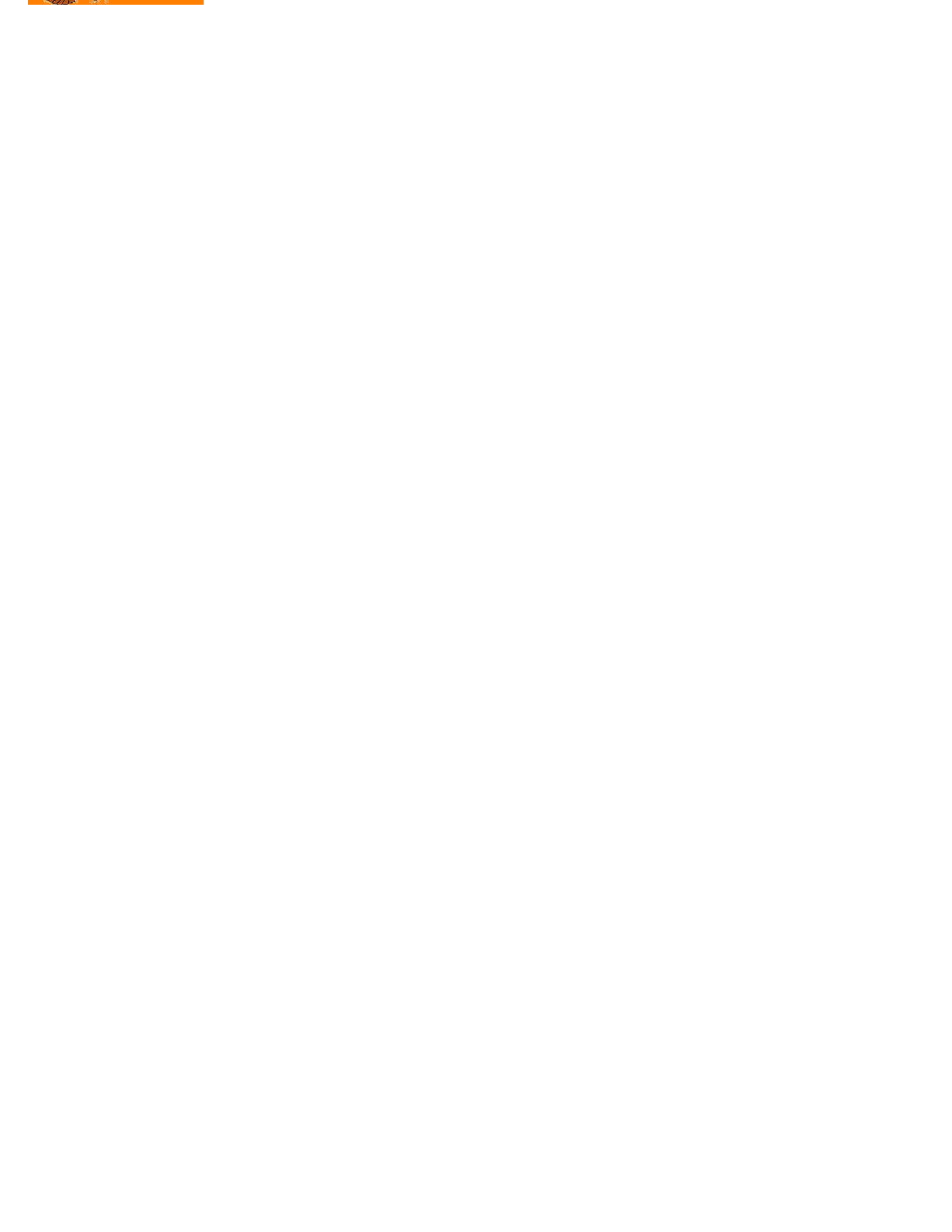


External

Like Zip and Tape drives, CD-Writers come in internal and external models. Use an external only if you want to use it with more than one computer or if you don't have an extra internal drive bay.

The added benefit of using CD-Writers for your backups is that you can also use the drive to save very large files to give to coworkers, family and friends. You can also make your own music CD's which is the craze with teenagers these days.

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Online Backup Web Sites

The last method for backing up your data is Online Backup Web Sites. With online backups you transfer your data over your Internet connection to the web site for storage on their computers. The main benefit is that you will satisfy the first rule of successful backups:

"Always keep your backup disks off site. Then if fire or theft strikes you will still have your data."

A second benefit to online backups is that your data is always available to you if you are traveling and disaster strikes.

The downside is that backing up your data over your Internet connection is very slow. You would not want to backup your entire hard drive, only your data.

Here are some links to online backup web sites.

- [carbonite.com](#)
- [ibackup.com](#)
- [@Backup](#)
- [xdrive](#)
- [onlinebackup.connected.com](#)

[Click here](#) to read a PC World article on 17 free and low-cost services.

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