How valuable is the data on your computer?

If you think the computer on your desk is valuable, you're right, but you may also be all wet. The computer may have cost $500 or $1000 or $3000, but its value is nothing compared to the data that's in the computer. How well protected is the data?

Take the computer on my desk, for example. It contains, among other important information, the background data for nearly a decade's worth of tax returns, photographs from digital cameras since 1998, audio files from every CD I own, website development files for clients from coast to coast, interviews I've conducted for Technology Corner, and lots of work-in-process files.

Replacing the computer, the operating system, and the applications installed on the machine would be unpleasant because of the cost and the time involved. But what about all the information! Can I replace photographs I took in 1998? Would clients understand if I lost the files I generated while creating websites for them? Would my CPA be able to "make up" financial information if I lost all of my records?

The answers to those questions are No, No, and No.

That's why having a current, complete, and verified backup is so important. Let's consider each of the adjectives associates with the word "backup".

Current: If the most recent backup you've done is 6 months or a year old and your disk drive crashes, you will lose 6 months' or a year's worth of work. Do you remember what you did 6 months ago? Would you be able to recreate it?

Complete: I'm willing to give a little ground here. If you're haven't modified the applications on your computer and you don't mind losing setup information, passwords, and such, then it's OK to back up just the data.

Verified: You may not want to wait for your backup program to compare all of the files on your backup media with the files on your computer's hard drive because it doubles the time required to complete the backup, but if you ever need to use the backup to restore files, you'll find it distressing if you learn that the backup files aren't readable.

Convinced, but unsure what to use?

I frequently hear from people who tell me that they back up their computer by installing a second hard drive and using that drive for backup. This is an uncommonly bad idea. Here are just a few of the things that can go wrong: 1) A faulty disk controller can scramble the data on both drives; 2) A thief can

steal the computer and the backup; 3) A fire can destroy the data and the backup. An second internal hard drive is a good place to backup files so that you can restore them quickly, but a bad place for long-term backup.

The only sure backup is one that you can store at some distance from the computer. At the very least, next door. Preferably several blocks away. My full backups are 15 miles from the computer. Your mileage may vary.

A happy medium.

If you've decided to store your backup media somewhere other than in the building with the computer, you have several choices.

CD discs: Although 700MB sounds like a lot of storage, it's not much when you consider today's hard drives are measured in GB. I've never recommended CDs for backup.

DVD discs: Single-layer DVDs hold nearly 5GB of data and discs cost less than $1 these days, so this is a good solution for many.

Tape: Tape is slow for backups, incredibly slow if you need to restore a file, and the least reliable medium available.

External hard drive: This is my favorite. Disk-based backup is fast and external USB or Firewire drives are reasonably priced. This is what I've used since about 2003.

FTP/on-line backup: If your backup needs are modest and you have a high-speed Internet connection, you might want to consider an on-line backup service. These tend to be a bit pricey and, even with a broadband connection, they're no faster than tape.

What's most important, though, is to have a current, complete, verified backup – whatever medium you prefer – and to store at least one copy elsewhere. ß

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Adobe & Macromedia

Adobe has acquired Macromedia for $3.4 billion. The combination gives Adobe nearly unquestioned ownership of the publishing and website development markets, even though the folks at Quark might dispute that. Adobe Acrobat and InDesign join Dreamweaver and Fireworks. There is overlap

in some areas – such as Macromedia Dreamweaver and Adobe GoLive, Macromedia Freehand and Adobe Illustrator. This isn't new territory for Adobe, though. The company already offers three applications that deal with publishing – InDesign, FrameMaker, and PageMaker.

This could put Adobe a little higher on Microsoft's radar, which is what happened when Corel started challenging Microsoft in areas that Microsoft felt should belong to it. Microsoft Media Player and Media Center PCs compete with products the new company owns or could develop.

Microsoft's *dynamic forms and graphics application* – the still in development *Avalon* – will be part of *Longhorn*, the next generation operating system. Adobe may be trying reach that destination before Microsoft gets there. ß

Some wonder whether a person should get "credit" for "reading" an audio book. I'm not sure who's keeping track, or why, but if I listen to a book while I'm driving and I learn something from it, I think that I've "read" the book.

What's next?

What about downloading movies to your PC? Or borrowing popular and classical music from an online library? These are the kinds of things that librarians are talking about today. These are technologies that will play ever more important roles – and not just at libraries.

So if you haven't visited your library lately – in person or on-line – now would be a good time to go! ß

The teacher who would not have a library card

An associate mentioned one of her relatives to me during a conversation we were having about libraries. My associate's sister-in-law refuses to have a library card because it would "clutter her wallet." It seems to me that any teacher who fears a library card will unduly clutter her wallet probably shouldn't be teaching. Libraries have always been magical places and today they are more magical than ever.

I recently borrowed a book on typography from the Worthington Public Library. The author said that typography transcends time – what is printed today travels to the future where it can be read. This is a point that author Stephen King makes in his book about writing. So libraries are places of time travel.

When I returned that book and picked up a CD with a 1960s performance by Gil Scott-Heron, I noticed a bookmark on the checkout counter. The headline was "DIGITAL BOOKS" and the text on the bookmark explained that I can now download electronic books and audio books by using my library account and the Internet.

The Mid-Ohio Library Digital Initiative (MOLDI), a partnership of nearly a dozen central Ohio libraries with probably 30 or 40 branches, allows any patron to download audio books and electronic books. The books can be played or viewed on a computer or transferred to a portable device (PDA, smart phone, or MP3 player). In addition, patrons are permitted to burn the files to a CD for later use.

Some are available to any number of people simultaneously while others are licensed for use by specific numbers of users. We're allowed to check out 5 titles at a time, each for 14 days – and to place an additional 5 items on reserve. Each book automatically checks itself back in on its due date.

Librarians are excited about this: No more lost books. No more damaged books. No need to check books back it and return them to the shelves.

This must be an exciting and, because change is stressful, frightening time for librarians. With the advent of widespread broadband access and encryption codes for audio, library patrons can check out books even when the library isn't open.

Getting here to there

What happens if you're in Columbus, you must have a 95MB file in Australia by Sunday, and today is Thursday? FedEx could get it there a day or two late for a lot of money. The post office could get it there later for less.

For about $50, I could get the file to Australia on a CD a day or two late. A 95MB file is far too large to send as an e-mail attachment and I didn't want to set up an FTP account and try to explain to the receiver how to log on and download the file.

YouSendIt to the rescue!

YouSendIt is a free service that allows anyone to send a file (up to 1GB) to anyone else by uploading the file to the YouSendIt server, which then sends the recipient a message with an encrypted link. The service is advertising supported, so the receiver will see an ad. YouSendIt can also deliver the link to you so that you can distribute it to those who need the file.

The *fine print* says that the file will be available for one week for a "limited" number of downloads. The intent, of course, is to avoid having someone store stolen software or pornography on the YouSendIt server. The company plans a fee-based service for high-volume users someday, but also plans to retain the ad-based service for those with modest needs.

If you have a large file that you need someone else to have quickly, give YouSendIt.com a try. Free, fast, and easy. Who could ask for more! ß

CORNER *on the market* by A.J. Stinnett

"It is nearly impossible to motivate employees.
To be profitable and successful,
a manager must enable employees
to be accountable and responsible for their own results."