

Technology Corner

By Joseph G. Hodges, Jr.

Inexpensive Disaster Planning for Your Computer Files

The recent disaster and resulting destruction of personal property that was brought on by Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast has, by necessity, heightened everyone's concerns about how we can better protect our vital client and office data files, as many of us who live in the south did not have our files and computers properly and timely backed up when that disaster hit. This is particularly so for solo and small firm practitioners who tend to worry less about such things than do the big firms with full-time IT departments—at least until a disaster like this hits and vital data records are lost forever.

In response to the Katrina disaster, the Law Practice Management Section of the American Bar Association compiled and posted a Katrina Resources Web page for lawyers impacted by Katrina. This page, which is located at www.abanet.org/lpm/katrina, is full of useful information to assist lawyers in rebuilding and continuing to practice in the aftermath of Katrina, plus other related law practice management resources. Hidden away in these ABA materials are leads to a rather inexpensive way of protecting your computer data files: affordable online file storage services that are currently available online. This is especially important now that there are so many vendors offering these services and the cost has come down. I will explore several of these services in this column, but I must caution that the list here is far from exhaustive, and all alternatives ought to be explored before a specific service is selected. These services used to be designed for large businesses and the cost was high. Now, affordable options are being provided for small businesses and solo practitioners but you have to be informed about the choices.

Most of these data storage services now offer a lot more than mere date file storage, although most of them had their genius in the data file storage end



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of the business. Now, the service offerings typically include, in addition to file storage, such things as remote file access, online file sharing, online data backups, hosting of photos and music files, bookmark storage and workgroup collaboration. One interesting function is the ability to upload and store then download large files that otherwise cannot be easily handled by many e-mail services. Another is the ability to upload files from your office and then access or download those files from a remote location, such as a branch office or an on-the-road location. I mention these additional services here only so you will be aware that they exist and you can factor these extra services into your decision as to which file storage provider to choose for your needs.

One of the most popular file storage services is Go Daddy (www.godaddy.com). They provide a service called Online File Folder. With this service, you can access, share and manage files and folders right from your desktop or any other PC location. It is also a great way to bypass ISP restrictions on e-mail attachment size. You can compress and expand your files as needed with a click of the mouse. They also offer 24/7 telephone support and outstanding customer service. As for cost, the Economy Edition of Online File Folder, which gives you 50 MB of storage, is just \$4.95 per year. The Deluxe Edition, which gives you 1,000 MB of storage, is just \$9.95 per year, and the Premium Edition, which gives you 2,000 MB of storage, is only \$19.95 per year. With prices like these, it is hard to argue that you should not at least give this service a try to see if you might like it.

Another popular service is Xdrive (www.xdrive.com). Their Web site has an excellent chart that compares the relative merits of their method of file storage to such things as USB drives, CD-ROMs and zip disks. This is well worth looking at if you currently use one of these alternative methods for file storage and backup. They are offering 5.0 GB of personal hard disk storage space on their server for \$10 per month. Xdrive stresses the security of their file storage, pointing out that they use 128-bit encryption during the file transfer phase, that their storage architecture is isolated, multi-tiered and gated, and that all stored files are password protected in their special disaster-proof data centers. They also offer 24/7 support. As for price, their service was free for 15 days as of December 2005. Thereafter, their Monthly Basic Plan is \$9.95 per month for 5 GB, and \$99.50 if paid for on an annual basis (that's less than \$8.29 per month). Their Power User Plan gets

you a whopping 50 GB for \$299.50 per year (that's less than \$24.95 per month).

Another viable option is Box.net (www.box.net). They provide 1 GB of storage for only \$2.99 per month (\$24.99 per year), with an alternative of 5 GB of storage for \$8.99 per month. They even offer student storage of 500 MB for only \$15 per year (aren't we all perpetual students?). Box.net touts as its advantages such things as a Web site that is easier to use and friendlier, charges that are reasonable for what you need, lots of security, no software or downloads required, responsive tech support, no banner ads, spam or pop-ups, and a 100-percent money-back guaranty within the first 30 days. Box.net is also the only online storage company that lets you syndicate your files *via* RSS using "filefeed" that is built into each Box.net account and made available at no extra cost.

Yet another contender is Streamload (www.streamload.com). They offer 10 GB of storage for \$9.95 per month, which is more than enough storage space for the average sole practitioner or small firm. Note that you have to download and install their proprietary software in order to use this service. They offer all the features the others do, although it is difficult to say what it is that makes them stand out from the rest, at least from the data that is on their Web site. According to their Web site, PC WORLD recommends this software. They have several account offerings, starting with a free one that offers you 10 GB of storage but is limited to 100 MB of uploads per month. Next is their Basic account plan, which gives you unlimited storage and uploads of 1 GB per month for \$4.95 per month or \$44.95 per year. Next is their Standard plan which gives you unlimited storage and uploads of 10 GB per month for \$9.95 per month or \$99.95 per year. Next is their Enhanced plan, which gives you unlimited storage and uploads of 25 GB per month for \$19.95 per month or \$199.95 per year. Finally there is their Premium plan, which gives you unlimited storage and uploads of 60 GB per month for \$39.95 per month or \$399.95 per year. What is readily apparent for all of this is that what distinguishes this company's offerings from all the others is the fact that all of their plans provide for "unlimited" storage, as this is almost unheard of in this business.

Another service is Ibackup (www.ibackup.com). They say that, with their service, you can have the same enterprise class data protection Fortune 500 companies use to safeguard their critical information at a fraction of the cost. According to their Web

site, their product was the 2004 PC MAGAZINE Editors' Choice for online backup solutions. They have quite a range of pricing options posted on their Web site. The Economy Plans range from \$9.95 per month for 5 GB to \$19.95 for 10 GB to \$49.95 for 25 GB, none of which come with their snapshot capability.

Another interesting entry is All The Free Space (www.all-the-free-space.com). This site advertises that they "help you find the best free online space for your files." The site includes a Cheap Web Hosting Directory and a Free Web Space Finder. Here, you can search for all the providers that offer file storage for free and on what terms. The December 2005 shot of this Web site indicated that there were 41 free file storage providers listed at that time. Well worth a little investigating.

I hope I have at least peaked your interest in exploring further some of these low cost options to storing your PC data files off site and the importance of doing so. Given the low cost of these services, there is almost no excuse for not giving one of these services

a try for your backup data storage needs, especially if you are located in a part of the country that is prone to natural disasters. Of course, all of us could easily suffer from something as simple as a building fire or a local flood or water damage from a variety of sources, so there is really no excuse for any of us not to explore this sort of data protection option further at this time, even if just for our mission critical data files.

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- Gas Price Check—AAA Daily Fuel Gauge Report: www.fuelgaugereport.com
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