

The Old Shoebox Newsletter

Adventures in modern technology by Marlo E. Schuldt

Copyright 2007



BACKUP - The Sequel

Pop Goes the Weasel

Or Click Goes Your Hard Drive

It's just a matter time

"Pop goes the weasel"

According to Wikipedia, pop goes the weasel is "... the repetitive sound of a machine governing the tedious work of textile workers toiling for subsistence wages."

I would suggest an altered meaning of "Pop goes the Weasel" for a device in the computer world as, "*The blinking light and repetitive clicking sound your computer makes to indicate the functioning of your hard drive as you toil endlessly for no wages at all!*" *In fact using your computer will require a significant portion of your wages.*

Benjamin Franklin offered many little truisms we still quote today for encouragement and warning. I think if Ben were alive today he would say something like this:

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death, taxes and the inevitability of a hard drive crash."



I'm writing a second newsletter to warn you yet again that it's only a matter of time before your hard drive (little weasel) goes POP. Some of you with new computers think this newsletter is for everyone else. You'd be wrong and you are among the most vulnerable since you have a false sense of security.

Many of you will go merrily on your way for another six months before backing up your new computer. So in your case be prepared to change this saying from “Ignorance is bliss” to “Ignorance is misery and just plain dumb if don’t back up.” Sorry to be so blunt – some of you need a real wakeup call and it’s not coming from the front desk, it’s coming from Marlo! You know the guy that has lost about 7 hard drives in less years.

Just because you have been lucky so far doesn’t mean your luck will hold. Here’s another example of faulty reasoning you might be able relate to.

I’ve only been in a few minor car accidents during my almost half century of driving cars. I used to attribute my “good luck” to my superior driving skills and all the experience I continue to acquire.



When the seatbelt law was passed I fought it and thought it was dumb to wear a seatbelt to drive a couple miles to a store. I figured the place for wearing seatbelts was on the freeway or during long trips.

However, statistics did not support my faulty reasoning. In fact it’s just the opposite. A while back I read that a high percentage of fatal accidents occur within 10 miles of your home. Here’s another sobering fact. The more often you get behind the wheel the greater chance you have of being in a car accident. Why? Because your odds of an accident simply go up in proportion with the increased time you spend driving. It has nothing to do with skill and everything to do with the frequency of use.

OK – I think you get the analogy. The more you use your computer the greater chance the drive will fail or wear out.

So why another newsletter about backing up?

Four days ago my new Vista laptop blew its hard drive. Did I say *NEW*? Yes, it’s just six months old. It wasn’t even a toddler yet! It’s not even my work computer and relatively speaking, I haven’t driven it many hours. Don’t be smug and think it was some cheapie, no name or built to order computer. It was a name brand and expensive. So you are at risk just as I was. However, I LOST!

Ok, you self venerating skeptics are probably thinking it was a cheap hard drive. Wrong again. I’ve taken it out to replace it and you would easily recognize the manufacturer. However, I did some research on the internet and found several bad reviews for that kind of notebook hard drive with many people complaining that this same kind of hard drive only lasted six months. I said “Wow” right out loud since that’s exactly how old my notebook drive was. I’ve decided to replace it with a different brand and hopefully it will last a little longer than six months.

OK – I hope I now have your attention.

YOU NEED TO DO SOME PREPARATION. - TODAY – NOT TOMORROW.

Backup Recommendations

You might as well do this right now while making your backup preparations.

1. Clean Up.

Most of us are procrastinators. We have a hard drive that’s bloated with a lot of junk, old programs we never use and many duplicate files. **IT’S TIME TO FINALLY GET RID OF THIS GARBAGE**

Yes I’m **YELLING** a lot in this newsletter so you can easily hear me no matter how far away you live!

Clean up even more stuff. Go into My Computer, right click on your C drive and select Properties (at the bottom of the list). Click on the Disk Cleanup button. Follow the instructions so get rid of even more junk. My editor said this about one of my many typos. *“Are you just trying to see if I’m paying attention or what!!! Why would anyone in their right (or wrong) mind want to “lick” on your C drive? I’m still laughing. You might want to leave it that way to see how many people catch it. Brings lots of strange, funny images to mind.”*

2. Be Selective – Don’t Backup Unnecessary Files

Worst case you can backup your whole hard drive. This might seem the easiest route, however, I can guarantee it is not the best idea for many reasons.

Takes a long time to backup everything so you won’t backup as often.

The more stuff (bloat and duplication) you backup the harder and longer it will take for you to find your important files when recovering from the imminent hard drive crash. (See I’m still subtly trying to convince you that it will happen to you).

You will waste a lot of hard drive space copying garbage and unnecessary files. However, be careful what you delete. Consider copying everything you are not sure about deleting to a DVD so you could restore the files from that media if you deleted the wrong things.

There are commercial backup programs available but they are somewhat complicated and take some time to figure out. I’d suggest you start quick and easy and copy your most important files first. Otherwise you will use the

excuse that using a backup program will be too hard or complicated to learn and you won’t backup anything.

3. Defragment the Hard Drive

Your hard drive will find information faster, be more efficient and probably last a little longer if you defrag at least once a month or more often. Defragging makes it possible for your computer to drive on the freeway to a distant town with few or no stops. A fragmented drive makes your drive work harder and takes longer to find information because it’s using all the convoluted back roads to get to the same destination.

To defragment, go into MY Computer, right click on your C drive and select properties. Next click the Defragment Now button and follow the directions. Plan to do something else since defragging can take a very long time and you shouldn’t be using your computer while it is defragging.

4. Get and Use an External Hard Drive

The new large drives are very inexpensive especially when you compare the cost with the value of your photos and information. We won’t even talk about the frustration factor and emotional upheaval a hard drive loss will have on you mentally. Unfortunately, if you are not prepared for a crash, you will discover that some things will NEVER be recovered. I’ve been there – done that – it really does a number on your head and may make others really angry with you.



I heartily suggest the Western Digital Passport drive. It’s small, fast and USB powered. The added convenience makes it easier to use and takes away the excuse of not wanting the hassle of hooking up another big drive to an AC outlet.

5. Two Forms of Backup in Two Locations

A backup will be no good if your house burns down while you gone! It's also not worth risking your life trying to get your computer out of a burning house.

However, if you insist on making backups on a second drive on your desktop computer I'd suggest a trip to the nearest sporting goods store to buy a large backpack and some good leather work gloves and running shoes.

Why? You will need an "easy on" backpack so you can quickly throw the computer into the pack while running out of the house. The gloves are necessary so you can quickly rip all the wires and connections out of the computer since you will not have time to crawl under the desk and carefully remove all the cables before you pass out or die from smoke inhalation.

It only takes seconds breathing smoke before you pass out – been there and done that one also and I'm lucky to still be here. (No I wasn't saving a hard drive from a burning house, it was a burning cabin in the mountains and I was only trying to get the fire extinguisher from behind a door – cabin was 50% destroyed but luckily it didn't burn the forest with it.

The running shoes are necessary for you to start jogging with the backpack filled with rocks so you can get in shape for the upcoming "fire race" you will be entering. You need to be in good shape and prepared for the 100 yard dash you will be making to the awaiting crowd all watching you from the street out front.

However I can see you keeping a small external hard drive near an exit so you could quickly and easily grab it on our way out of the burning house with your kids, spouse and dog.

Seriously, you need two backups. I'd suggest an external hard drive and CD/DVDs in a carrying case. The second set should be at a relative's home or in a safe deposit box at your

local bank. Even if this costs you an extra \$100, it will be worth the expense and time to safeguard and protect your photos, sound files and other family history information.

6. Use the Heritage Collector Backup Program Often

You will be covered when your crash occurs or when you buy a new computer and need to reinstall. If you are adding new information, backup once a week or more often. How often? Just ask yourself how much stuff you would have to retype or rescan? If you have very special photos from your camera, backup now or more often since digital photos cannot be replaced.



7. Create a Download Folder

The single biggest headache when restoring or getting a new computer is reinstalling all the programs. This little task (joke) is made worse because you will need to update ALL the software programs. You will also need to find all the update files you have downloaded to update the programs.

Make a folder called Download. Do it now. Every time you download an update, don't put it on your desktop or somewhere else, put it in the download folder.

In your new Download folder create another folder with the program name and then copy the download files into that folder. This will make it easier to find the right update file since updates often have strange names not related to the software program. You will be glad that you can quickly and easily find all the updates you will need when you reinstall.

8. Keep all Your Documentation and Programs Together

Devote a binder, file folder or desk drawer to store all your programs and install disks. There is no need to make reinstalling any more painful than it needs to be by trying to find all the programs scattered all over your work area or office.

9. Passwords and Install Keys

The following recommendations are highly critical if you have downloaded software.

Do screen captures of the license codes of your software. Often you can find this by clicking on the About menu for the software. It may also be located somewhere else. This is the time to find it because if your hard drives dies, you will be toast and may not have any way to prove you purchased the software.

Use a screen capture program or press the PrtScn button (print screen) and then open a file in Word or WordPerfect and use the paste command. This puts a copy of the screen in the document. PRINT IT AND FILE IT. You can also use a screen capture program to save the screen as a JPG file and then save that file. This will also make it easier to display and enter the code or install key later.

Print all e-mails containing codes and install keys and put them in the folder or drawer with your programs. This will also give you a proof of purchase if you didn't register your software.

It's also a good idea to copy the programs you purchased as downloads to a CD. You could even copy a text file (txt) to the CD with the install key in the file for reference later.

10. E-mail and Favorites

You will lose ALL your e-mails, addresses and favorites if your drive crashes. These files can also be backed up. Consult the Help menu in Outlook or the e-mail program you are using for backup instructions.

11. Software List

This will sound dumb, but make a list of all the programs you have installed. Once your drive is dead all you will have is your memory to rely on with regard to what you need to reinstall. This will save frustration later when you need to do something quickly. You will try to load a file from a little program you need when you discover you forgot to install it. Do it now when you are not in a hurry.

12. Be Selective

Now is a good time to install only the programs you need and have been using. Do not install programs you no longer need. This will save time and keep your computer running faster.

13. Document – Document – Document

This is unlucky item #13. Chances or very high if you are reading this, you will need to contact customer support. This can be a very bad experience or it can be easier. Consult my previous newsletter regarding how to deal with customer support.

Only one suggestion here – BE NICE! It's not their problem – It's Yours! You can always get more agitated later. If you are nice you will get more. This always works when I say, "I'm really frustrated but I won't take it out on you!" I usually get a "thank you" when I say that. When the tech says, "Thank You," that is your first indication you have connected with the tech support person in a positive manner. DO IT.

Get a clean sheet of paper to document names of tech support you work with, dates, case numbers and ALL phone numbers and the serial number and model of your computer or device. THEY WILL ASK FOR THE SERIAL NUMBER. Better to get the flashlight out now or magnifier so you can read it slowly and correctly and get it written down on the paper so you can read it to them when you call.

Here's a sad but true comment. I've never solved a support issue with the first call. It always takes at least two calls and they all ask for the same information because you rarely get the same support tech twice. So take notes for your reference and for proof later. This will "save your bacon" if / when you get a difficult or arrogant tech. Reciting names, dates and recommended procedures will put them in their place and scare them because you can come back on them and you will win because you have the documentation to defend what has been recommended.

14. Getting into Windows

Two things usually happen when a hard drive dies. You get the "Blue Screen of Death" (BSOD) with a bunch of white writing saying a lot of stuff you can't read because it will disappear very quickly. Finally you will probably see, "Cannot find operating system." You're toast!

Here is where you need to make an important decision. You have two choices. Try to solve the problem yourself or get professional help.

Messing around with your computer may result in the total loss of all information with no chance of future recovery. If you are brave (or dumb) or poor or both, you may want to attempt to try and solve the problem yourself. I cannot guarantee the following information will save your information or not cause additional problems. I'd suggest you read the recommendation below and decide if you want to try it. In any case, you will be responsible for your actions – not me.

If you are lucky you may still be able to get back into Windows. Be ready with the external hard drive because you may only get one shot to copy files from your ailing drive.

As the computer is booting up, repeatedly press the F8 key. This will cause the computer to stop before it fails to boot up into Windows. You will have some options. Select the Safe Mode option. You may still be able to get into your

computer in this basic state. If you can get in begin copying your most important files to the external hard drive. Copy folders in order of importance.

Once you have all the files copied, you can then try other things to remedy your problem such as calling Customer Support and/or reinstalling Windows or testing the hard drive.

I was lucky with my laptop. I was able to get back in to Windows using the Safe mode and copied all the files I did not have backed up in Heritage Collector. When Support asked me to do a drive test I was not concerned to learn it was gong to erase my hard drive since I had already copied all the other files to my eternal hard drive.

Another fun typo my editor pointed out for your enjoyment. "Is an "eternal" hard drive something like an "external" hard drive or is it just more heavenly?"

Other than all the time lost, my experience had a happy ending. In the past, before the backup in Heritage Collector, my endings were not happy, some were disastrous and I can still remember some of the treasured photos that are now gone forever.

Final Editor Comment: "This has probably been my most entertaining proofreading so far. Your fingers did some very creative typing. Thanks for several good laughs."

A special thanks to my editor and good friend Narda.

Copyrighted Material

Please remember the newsletters are copyrighted. If you would like to include a newsletter or excerpts in your newsletter or publication, please e-mail me for permission.