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Where to back up your PC data online

By James Turner

The list of things that can go wrong with computers is so long it's a wonder anyone trusts them at all.

At the same time, more and more people are using their computers to store critical information about their lives, from painstakingly compiled genealogical data to original manuscripts to difficult-to-replace financial data.

Prudent computer owners always have backup devices to save such information. But storage options have evolved to match today's advanced desktop and laptop machines.

As a result, the days of using floppy discs or even external zip drives have given way to high-capacity CD-recordable – and now DVD-recordable – drives.

But even with these new technologies, you can still lose everything if, say, a fire damages your house. The solution: a new wave of backup services that move sensitive data out of your house entirely. These online services use a high-speed connection – such as a digital subscriber line (DSL) or cable modem – to move your information to massive data warehouses.

Users can gain access to their stored information with a few clicks of a mouse. All data transfers are encrypted to ensure your privacy.

For users of the popular QuickBooks financial package from Intuit, the QuickBooks Online Backup service is available (www.quickbooks.com/services/backup). This service is offered in three tiers:

- A \$79.95-a-year service that stores up to 100 megabytes (MB) of Quickbooks/Quicken-related data.
- A \$14.95-a-month "Premium" service that stores about 4 gigabytes (GB) of data, and allows

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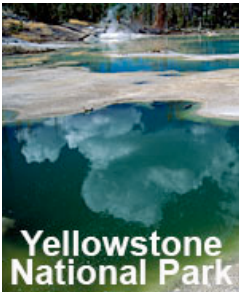
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users to select which files and directories they want to back up.

- A \$19.95-a month "Premium Plus" service. This option is limited to 10GB of data. Also, the program does not allow for selective back-ups, so if your hard drive holds more than 10GB of information, as many new computers do, this service won't work for you.

An alternative with more options: iBackup.com (www.ibackup.com). This service has storage levels that run from 50MB (about 10 MP3 songs or 100 digital photos) for \$3 per month to 100GB for \$800 per month.

While iBackup charges more than Quickbooks for the same storage, it also has a number of nice features, such as making your online-backup space look like another disk drive on your PC.

You can also set up multiple sub-accounts, so that you can back up important information from your computer as well as your children's, without the two mixing together.

iBackup can also send you a CD-ROM copy of your backup, so that you can restore your system if it gets totally wiped out (\$19.95 per 680MB CD).

For those not ready to buy, both Quickbooks and iBackup offer 30-day free trials.

- *James Turner is a computer consultant and freelance technology writer.*

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