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Windows XP Backup Made Easy

Published: July 14, 2003
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Most people think about backing up data about 10 minutes after it's too late to do any good. If you realize that you really need a good backup program *after* your hard disk crashes or your teenager decides to clear out some of your files to make room for new music downloads, you're setting yourself up for a data disaster. Are you prepared to lose your e-mail address book (and all your messages)? What would you do if your entire collection of digital photos disappeared tomorrow in a puff of electrons? Do you have backup copies of your electronically-filed tax return or your crucial correspondence?

Fortunately, backing up your essential files is neither difficult nor time-consuming. In fact, the whole process can take as little as 10 minutes a week, and you can let Windows XP do most of the work.

Buy the Book

Faster Smarter Microsoft Windows XP

This friendly, high-energy guide by Ed Bott makes it easy to teach yourself exactly what you need.

Get Started

Before you can even think about creating a backup, you have to get your files in order. This doesn't mean you need to make like [Felix Unger](#) and compulsively rearrange every file in every folder. Just check to make certain all your essential data files are stored in one easy-to-find location.

Windows XP makes this task especially easy by giving every user account its own personal profile, which consists of a set of subfolders in the Documents and Settings folder. Your profile holds your personal files (in the My Documents folder), Outlook Express e-mail messages, Internet Explorer Favorites and cookies, and information about your settings and preferences. If you have personal data stored elsewhere, consider moving it into the My Documents folder to make backing up easier. If you're unwilling or unable to move those files, make a note of where they're located so you can be sure you add them to your backup set later.

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Open Windows XP Backup

Windows XP includes its own backup program, although you may need to do some digging to find it. You can also take your pick of third-party programs (listed at the end of this column) that add bells and whistles you won't find in the basic Windows XP Backup utility.

If you use Windows XP Professional, the Windows Backup utility (Ntbackup. exe) should be ready for use. If you use Windows XP Home Edition, you'll need to follow these steps to install the utility:

1. Insert your Windows XP CD into the drive and, if necessary, double-click the CD icon in My Computer.

2. On the Welcome to Microsoft Windows XP screen, click **Perform Additional Tasks**.

3. Click **Browse this CD**.

4. In Windows Explorer, double-click the ValueAdd folder, then Msft, and then Ntbackup.

5. Double-click **Ntbackup.msi** to install the Backup utility.

For more information, see [How to Install Backup in Windows XP Home Edition](#).

With that chore out of the way, you're ready to begin backing up. By default, the Backup utility uses a wizard that makes the process straightforward. To start Backup:

1. Click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, point to **Accessories**, point to **System Tools**, and then click **Backup** to start the wizard.

2. Click **Next** to skip past the opening page, choose **Back up files and settings** from the second page, and then click **Next**. You should see the page shown in Figure 1, which represents your first decision point.

Figure 1

Decide What to Back Up

You might be tempted to click **All information on this computer** so that you can back up every bit of data on your computer. Think twice before choosing this option, however. If you've installed a slew of software, your backup could add up to many gigabytes. For most people, the **My documents and settings** option is a better choice. This selection preserves your data files (including e-mail messages and address books) and the personal settings stored in the Windows Registry.

If several people use your computer—as might be the case on a shared family PC—select **Everyone's documents and settings**. This option backs up personal files and preferences for every user with an account on the computer.

If you know that you have data files stored outside your profile, click **Let me choose what to back up**. This option takes you to the **Items to**

Back Up page shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Select the **My Documents** check box to back up all the files in your personal profile, and then browse the **My Computer** hierarchy to select the additional files you need to back up. If some of your files are on a shared network drive, open the **My Network Places** folder and select those folders.

This option also comes in handy if you have some files you now you don't want to back up. For instance, I have more than 20 GB of music files in the My Music folder. To keep my data file backup to a reasonable size, I click the check box next to the My Music folder. This clears the check box from all the files and subfolders in My Music.

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Decide Where to Store Your Backup Files

On the **Backup Type, Destination, and Name** page, Windows asks you to specify a backup location. If you're one of those exceedingly rare individuals with access to a backup tape, the Backup utility gives you a choice of options in the Select a backup type box. No tape drive? No problem. Backup assumes you're going to save everything in a single file; you just have to choose a location for that file and give it a name.

By default, Backup proposes saving everything to your floppy drive (drive A). Although that might have made sense 10 years ago, it's hardly a rational choice today. You'd need dozens, perhaps hundreds of floppy disks

to store even a modest collection of data files, especially if you collect digital music or photos.

Instead, your best bet is to click **Browse** and choose any of the following locations:

- Your computer's hard disk. The ideal backup location is a separate partition from the one you're backing up. If your hard disk is partitioned into drive C and drive D and your data is on drive C, you can safely back up to drive D.

- A Zip drive or other removable media. At 100-250MB per disk, this is an option if you don't have multiple gigabytes to back up. Unfortunately, the Windows Backup utility can't save files directly to a CD-RW drive.

- A shared network drive. You're limited only by the amount of free space on the network share.

- An external hard disk drive. USB and IEEE 1394 or FireWire drives have dropped in price lately. Consider getting a 40 GB or larger drive and dedicating it for use as a backup device.

After you've chosen a backup location, enter a descriptive name for the file, click **Next** to display the wizard's final page, as shown in Figure 3, and then click **Finish** to begin backing up immediately.

Figure 3

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Set a Schedule—and Stick to It

If you're disciplined enough, you can repeat the above steps once each week and perform regular backups when you're ready. If you'd rather not count on remembering to perform this crucial task, however, set up an automatic backup schedule for Windows. When you get to the final page of the Backup Wizard (see Figure 3 above), don't click **Finish**. Instead, click the **Advanced** button, and click **Next** to open the **When to Back Up** page. Choose **Later**, and then click **Set Schedule** to open the **Schedule Job** dialog box shown in Figure 4.
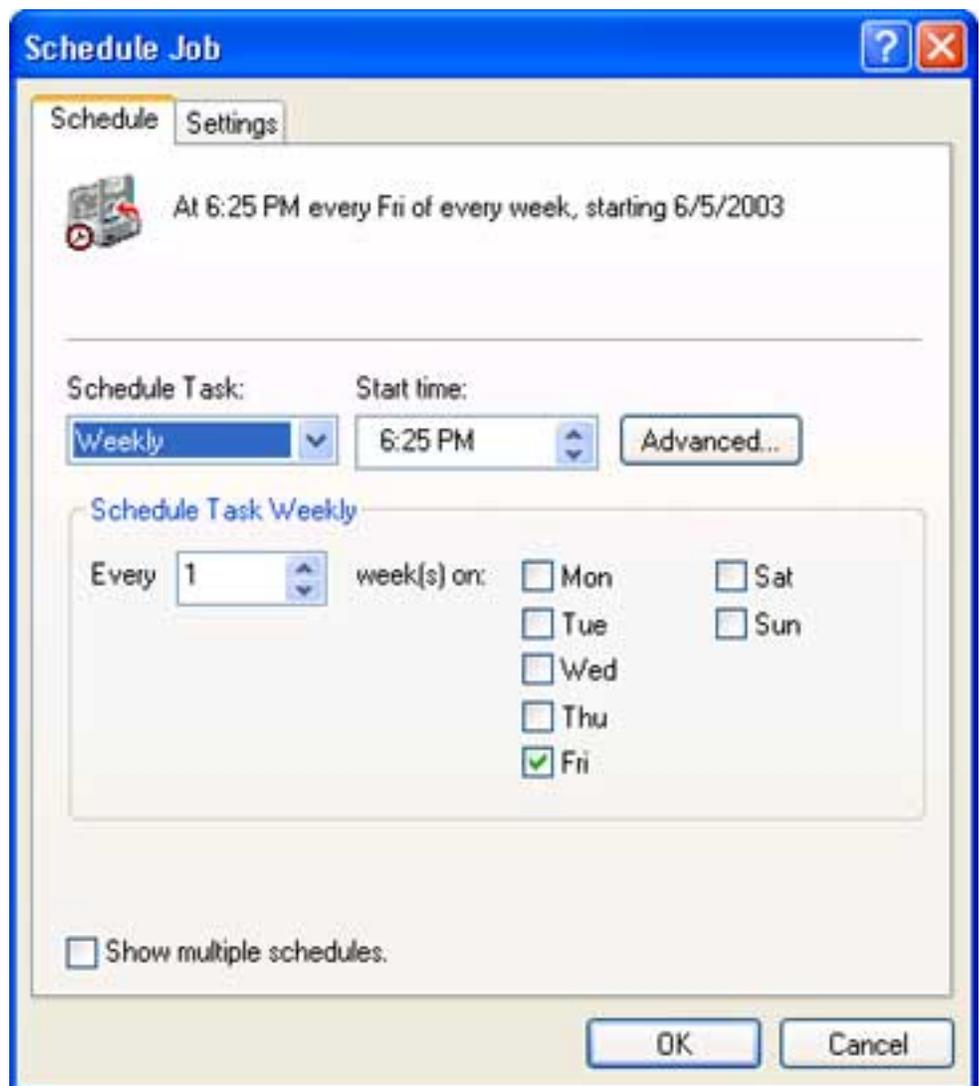

Figure 4

This example shows the settings for a weekly backup on Friday afternoon—a good way to make sure your week's work is protected. But you can set almost any schedule you want by poking around in the extensive set of options available in this dialog box. After you click **OK** to save your changes, Windows XP runs the backup automatically. Just remember to leave your computer turned on.

All in all, you can count on backing up 5 GB of data in as little as 10

minutes. And you don't need to worry about shutting down running programs, either—thanks to a feature called **volume shadow copy,** the Backup utility can safely create a copy of any file, even if it's currently in use. For more information, see the Microsoft TechNet article, [Volume Shadow Copy Technology](#).

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Other Backup Alternatives

The Windows Backup utility is handy and free, but it's not your only backup choice. Depending on your preferences, you can choose all sorts of third-party backup solutions. For instance:

- Want to back up your e-mail and nothing else? Try [OutBack Plus 4](#) or the Microsoft Outlook [Personal Folders Backup Utility](#) if you use any version of Microsoft Outlook, or use [OE Backup](#) for Outlook Express. These programs specialize in helping you keep safe copies of your messages and addresses.

- Want the option to restore your entire hard drive in case of a crash? Drive imaging tools like [PowerQuest Drive Image 2002](#) can take a virtual snapshot of your disk, compress it to a single file, and save it for quick recovery later.

- Worried that fire, flood, or theft will wipe out your backup copies along with your computer? Consider paying a few dollars a month for online backup alternatives like [Xdrive Plus](#) or [@Backup](#), where you can upload your most important files for storage on a secure server.

Naturally, you always have the option of copying important files to removable media. With CD-RW drives and their 650 MB-per-disk capacity, that's an attractive option. In fact, just about any backup program is preferable to doing nothing and hoping that your data will magically take care of itself.

Expert Zone columnist Ed Bott is an award-winning computer journalist who's been working with Microsoft Windows for more than 15 years. His latest Microsoft Press books include [Faster Smarter Microsoft Windows XP](#) and [Microsoft Windows XP Inside Out](#) (with Carl Siechert and Craig Stinson).

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How to backup Windows XP system state, partition or disk? The reliable backup software provides you with backup, restore and clone functions for data & system protection under Windows 10/7/Vista/XP/8. Suppose you are going to backup the system and restore your entire hard drive in case of a crash, or need to back up the partition or disk to the CD/DVD to protect your data, Windows built-in backup utility in Windows XP, obviously, cannot come to your aid. Fortunately, depending on your preferences, you can choose third-party backup software. The XP backup software, like EaseUS Todo Backup, is your choice. It can backup your XP system partition in one-click without worrying anymore about system crash or data loss due to some unexpected incidents. Learn how to back up and restore your PC for Windows 7 and Windows 8. If you've never used Windows Backup before, or recently upgraded your version of Windows, select Set up backup, and then follow the steps in the wizard. If you've created a backup before, you can wait for your regularly scheduled backup to occur, or you can manually create a new backup by selecting Back up now. Find files that were restored from a backup made on another computer. If you're restoring files from a backup that was made on another computer, the files will be restored in a folder under the user name that was used to create the backup. If the user names are different, you'll need to navigate to the folder where the files are restored. Windows XP includes a simple tool that can help you backup your data. It isn't rich in features as a commercial tool, but for those that simply need to make copies of their data, it can do the job easily. To use the tool to backup your data, follow these steps: Start the "Backup" tool by clicking "Start->All Programs->Accessories->System Tools->Backup". While not rich in features, the "Backup" tool included in Windows XP makes it very easy to make copies of your data. If you have a lot of data, like digital photos, essays, or other files you don't want to lose, then backing up those files will ensure you will always have them available. Twitter Facebook Google+ Buffer Pin It. 2 Responses to "How to Backup Data in Windows XP". Annie Buck says: October 12, 2009 at 4:04 pm.