

Back it up!

CRUNCH! Your hard drive just corrupted for no apparent reason.

- Where are your typed letters and documents?
- Where are your digital photographs?
- Where's the password for your email account?

Computers may be clever, but should the worst happen, you'd may as well start using your hard disk as an ornamental paperweight.

What can I do?

Lots. Let's have a look at the different types of backup you can use:

CD-Rewriter

These are installed in most machines built in the last 5 years. Using some software on your computer, you can back up 700 Megabytes of data onto a CDR or CDRW. The disks are around £5 for a pack of 10 for a supermarket.

DVD-Rewriter

You're more likely to find these on machines that were built in the last 3 to 5 years. Similar to CD-Rewriters, you can back up 4.7 Gigabytes onto each DVD (about 4,700 megabytes). The disks cost a couple of pounds more than CDR/CDRW.

USB Flash Drive

These are bought from a supermarket or computer shop such as PC World, or Comet etc.

They cost anything from £5 to £50 depending on the amount of data you want to back up. They plug into the USB drive on your computer and are very small and portable.

External Hard Disk

These cost somewhere in the region of £40 to £150, again depending on capacity. External Hard Disks often come with special software for backing up the files on your computer.

Online Backup

Companies such as 'Mozy' offer online backup whereby your files are uploaded over the internet to a secure location. If you lose any of your data, you log in to 'Mozy' via the website and choose the files you want to download. The basic account is free, but if you want extra space, you can pay extra for this.

Whatever type of backup you choose, it's best to take one regularly to minimise what you'll lose between backups.

If it's too late and you have no backup, there are services which offer data recovery. These can be expensive, and it often takes a long time to recover any information on the drive. In many instances, partial recovery is all that is available. There really is no substitute for a backup.

N.B. Tesco sell a lockable fireproof safe for £20 which is A4 size and is big enough to hold your important paper documents as well as 10-15 disks.