

Doctors Orders

Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of the Computer Doctors Newsletter.

Apologies to the few customers still getting text corruption in our newsletter. We have really been working hard to try and solve the problem. It just goes to show how difficult it is to solve a software conflict when lots of people, all with different machines and different software want to read a common document. We regularly have customers sending Word documents by email and they really don't travel well, often appearing disjointed or spread over multiple pages, depending on the receiver's margin setup.

As most people read this with Adobe Reader (ex Acrobat reader) or an Adobe plug-in which reads it in their browser, we thought we would email Adobe to see if they had any light they could throw on the subject. They advised embedding the fonts we use in the document in case the receiver doesn't have them on their PC. But we use Verdana, a standard Windows font that every Windows PC should have and embedding fonts increases the file size to 1Mb which would increase the time considerably between clicking the email link and seeing something on the screen. Especially for dial up customers, who would probably think their PC had crashed!

So we have just had a tinker round the edges and all the PC's we have tried it on looked OK.

However, if your copy is totally scrambled, please email our sales email address on the back page and we'll post you a printed copy. (Please don't click "Reply" to the newsletter email as this is sent by an automated sender and emails to that address are not monitored).



Inside this issue

- People still getting ripped off with XP Anti-Virus 2008.
- Organize your Outlook mail Folders.
- Bargain HP Colour printer offer.
- The basics—More on file systems. Move and copy your documents.
- We test various file backup methods to find the best.
- Can't remember all those hundreds of passwords—we check out password managers.
- Windows 7, yet another version of Microsoft Windows to confuse us all.
- Google is riding high with its latest product, an Apple iPhone clone.

System-clogging antivirus scam still hitting home

Queries entered at Google and other Web search engines are returning links to sites that try to infect your system with the dreaded Antivirus 2008/2009 scam. This threat was reported by us to our customers some weeks ago, but we are still seeing customers tricked into paying money for a useless product.

One customer was one of the victims of this malware after he followed such a search link. These downloads purport to be free antivirus programs, yet in reality they offer no protection but demand payment for their removal.

Using MalwareBytes Anti-Malware helped us get his PC back into shape. The incident points out how difficult it is to secure a Windows XP machine when the user runs with full administrator rights. (Unlike Vista)

Search engines do not cleanse their results, and anti-virus programs are not stopping many of these rogue variants. They morph and change just enough to evade our virus protection.

It's easier for us to protect the XP systems in our office because we can ensure that they are deployed without administrator rights. Doing the same for our customer's PC's is tougher.

This is yet another reminder that you have to be careful out there. Watch out for sites that try to trick you into downloading protection that is anything but.

MalwareBytes Anti-Malware is available from our free download site.

<http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/links.htm>

They morph and change just enough to evade our virus protection.

Take control of your overflowing mail box by making use of Outlook's organisational tools.

Information comes thick and fast these days – email has revolutionised the way in which we communicate with each other, and it can become frustrating trying to deal with it all in a timely and efficient manner. Most businesses make use of Microsoft Outlook for sending and receiving email, so the first thing to do is ask yourself and your employees if they're making the most efficient use of it. Take the time to set things up now and you'll reap the benefits later when you're asked to forward on that email from way back containing last month's sales figures.

<http://www.eperfectdata.com/land/XGN7XM>

We have managed once again to get stock of the HP PhotoSmart D5160 printer. Our first delivery sold out in a few days and such is the demand at this price we have been unable to squeeze any more out of our suppliers until now.



We guarantee that you won't find this printer cheaper anywhere locally. **In fact we are so confident that if you find it locally selling for less and they have stock, we will give you back twice the difference!**

At this price its collection only from our Northampton Workshop or delivery free in our area with installation. (+£60)

£44.99 inc vat.

The basics—File systems 2

Last month we saw how the file structure was made up of files within folders, within folders, within folders just like paper files within paper folders.

Now we find out what these files actually do!

A file can be as simple as a letter that you have written to a friend or as complex as an executable file that runs the program that you use to write the letter. In-between are thousands of different files that are support files for programs and others used by windows to carry out various tasks.

As mentioned last month the 3 letter file extension, that by default is hidden, can often tell you what sort of file it is. Most people will recognise a .doc extension as a Word document and a .jpg as a photo and some may have seen an error message relating to .dll files, which are the support files for many Windows functions.

If one of these Windows files is missing or corrupted, then the particular function that is controlled by that file, will not work. You may or may not notice this immediately, as it may be a function that you use rarely.

Files get corrupted or deleted in many ways. A faulty piece of RAM memory or a faulty hard drive can corrupt a file and go on corrupting files over a period of time until the whole system crashes or fails to start. So do not ignore various functions on your PC not working, it's your PC's way of telling you that its not feeling too well. As a minimum, you should back up the files you have created (your data) as these are irreplaceable. The programs that you created these files with can be reinstalled from the CD but your personal letters and photos are gone forever once that particular file is lost.

So how do you back up your data? Backing up used to mean (and sometimes still does) collecting together all your data files, compressing them into one file to save space and storing them on a tape or CD/DVD. These days, most people just copy their valuable files onto an external drive which plugs into a USB port or even onto a pen drive if you don't have many files to copy. That way, if your PC dies you can plug the external drive into another PC and all your files will appear.

Many people do not back up their data because they are not sure how to copy files. Windows XP and Vista make it easy for you by placing most of your important files in the "My Documents" folder. This contains other folders called "My Pictures" and "My Music" as well as folders that you may have created yourself or been created for you by various programs to store the files you have created from within those programs.

To copy the whole contents of your "My Documents" folder to an external drive, click on the "My Documents" icon on your desktop or on your start menu. This will open your "My Documents" window showing all the files and folders that you have in the "My Documents" folder. To copy all these

files together, press "Ctrl" key and letter "A" key together and all the files will be selected by a shadow over them. Then right click with your mouse and on the menu that pops up select "Copy" with the left mouse button as usual.

This places a copy of all your files in a hidden area of Windows known as the "Clipboard". You can close down your "My Documents" folder and the clipboard will still retain a copy of your files, but do not switch your PC off or save anything else to your clipboard until you have carried out the next sequence.

If you have an external drive, when you plug it into your PC, it will make an audible ding-dong and may open a window showing the contents of that drive ie any files or folders that you may have copied there previously. If Windows recognises some of the files as music or photos, it may ask you if you wish to open the files with Windows Media Player (music) or Internet Explorer to display photos. In this instance we are just going to copy more files to the drive so select "Open Folder to View Files".

You can create a folder on this external drive to put your saved files in, called say, "Saved Documents". To do this click File/New/Folder from the menu bar and a new folder will appear in the window, with the default name "New Folder". This should be highlighted ready for you to type your choice of folder name. If it isn't, right click "New Folder" and select (left click) "Rename". This will highlight the name to enable you to change the name.

Once you have the folder how you want it, double click it and a new blank window will open up.

To copy your files from "My Documents" into it, (which are now in temporary store in the hidden clipboard) simply right click on a blank area of the window and select "Paste". You will now see all your files and folders flood into the previously empty folder.

Now you have all your "My Document" files in two places which is always safer than just one place.

You can also transfer files by having the two folders open on the screen at the same time, (resize each windows by dragging the edge with the left mouse button down) and carrying out a "Drag and Drop" procedure. Highlight the files to be copied, as before, using "Ctrl" + "A", select one file using the right mouse button and keeping the right mouse button down, drag all the files to the other open window where you want the files copied to.

When you release the right mouse button a pop up box asks you if you want to "move" or "copy" the files to the new folder. Only use "Move" if you want the original files deleted after the transfer. You can also accomplish a "move" when using the previous "Copy/Paste" menu options by using the "Cut/Paste" menu instead.

Find the backup technique that works for you

There are so many backup options available that it's difficult to decide which is the best.

Of course, you have to figure out which files you need to back up before you can determine the best method for doing so.

Are you backing up all the files you need to?

When people think of "backup," most of them focus on their Word docs, spreadsheets, e-mail, and other application files. These are certainly important, but there are a lot of other vital files on your PC.

Your bookmarks, browsing history, and saved passwords are examples of such files — not to mention the key settings in your application programs, such as the account information for your e-mail and FTP clients. The list goes on and on.

The best way to identify your backup needs is to imagine that you've bought a brand-new PC. Ask yourself: "What information would I need to move to that PC so I could work efficiently?"

This is not a theoretical exercise; if your current PC gets stolen or fails catastrophically, you'll find yourself in this exact position.

As soon as you start documenting your backup needs, you'll discover that some of the data you need to back up is not held in Windows' default file-storage locations (such as My Documents in XP and Documents in Vista) but rather in system files such as the Registry and the more arcane user folders.

Worse still, you may not even be able to identify where your data is held. Ask the average Windows user where e-mail files are stored and you will most likely get a blank look. Advanced users face the same problem; I once spent an hour looking for my FTP account settings, only to finally discover that they were stashed in the Registry.

The fact that your vital data may be located in many and various locations on your PC lies at the heart of why backup is not a simple task. This is also critical in determining the best backup solution for your system.

Backup option 1: Stick with local storage

Backing up your PC data files to another hard drive or to a CD or DVD is by far the most widely used approach.

Normally, this is done using a specialty data-backup program such as Genie Backup Manager [1], NTI BackupNow [2], Handy Backup[3], Cobian Backup[4], or any one of dozens of similar commercial or freeware pro-

grams. File backup can also be accomplished by using a file-synchronization program such as Always Sync [5] from Usov Labs.

Until recently, most folks backed up their files to optical media, but external USB hard drives and flash drives are now so cheap that they are fast replacing CDs and DVDs as the backup medium of choice for PC users.

Here are some of the advantages of local backup:

- It's conceptually simple. You identify which files are important and back them up automatically to another drive on your PC.
- There is a wide choice of backup software available, including a number of free products.
- It's convenient, as everything takes place on your own PC under your control.
- It's fast, because backup and recovery take place at your system's high data-transfer rates.
- It's cheap. Both the software and the backup media cost very little.

Here are some disadvantages of the local approach:

- It can be difficult to identify where on your PC the data you want to backup is located. The best backup software, such as Genie Backup Manager, can help in this regard by automatically locating some hidden files, such as e-mail archives and bookmarks, but the problem remains.
- Onsite backup needs to be complemented with additional offsite copies to guard against fire, theft, and similar risks. Not all users are disciplined enough to create and maintain an offsite-backup regimen.
- Most data backup programs do not back up Windows itself, so if your OS fails, your backed-up data will not be accessible.

Backup option 2: Store your data online

With the ready availability of broadband Internet, it is now quite practical for you to back up your data to a remote server by using an online backup service such as Jungle Disk [6], Mozy [7], or Carbonite [8].

These are some of online backup's advantages:

- Your data is secure against fire, theft, and other local mishaps, because the backup copies are stored on a remote server.
- It's convenient in that your backup data can be remotely accessed from any PC.
- It can be a cheap option for low-volume users, as some commercial services such as Mozy offer limited storage for free.

There are also some disadvantages to online backups:

- Backing up and recovering your data are much slower than with local backup solutions. For large, regularly updated files such as Outlook .pst files, this can be a real problem because the online copy may never be current.
- Security is a concern because your data is transmitted across the Internet. Worse still, your files are in the hands of a third party. Encrypting your files reduces these risks, but this remains an issue for sensitive data.
- Service continuity is a real concern. Several online backup companies have failed, causing their customers to lose all backups. This risk can be minimized by choosing a substantial and well-funded provider, but the danger cannot be eliminated.
- It can be relatively expensive, as most online backup services charge a recurring fee rather than a one-time payment.

Backup option 3: Use drive-imaging software

Drive imaging is a backup technique that involves taking a snapshot of your entire hard drive and storing this snapshot as a compressed file called an image file.

Unlike local file backup and online backup, this approach captures all the data on your computer, not just specific files. That means everything gets backed up, even your Windows configuration itself.

There are several excellent drive-imaging programs available, including Acronis True Image [9] and Symantec's Norton Ghost [10]. A freeware alternative is Drive Image XML [11].

Among the advantages of disk imaging are these:

- Since you're also backing up Windows, you can restore your entire system from the backup image if your PC gets corrupted or becomes unbootable.
- It's simple. There's no need to specify what is backed up, because everything is backed up.
- It's convenient. Individual files stored in an image can usually be accessed or recovered by mounting the image file as a virtual disk drive. This takes less than a minute. Once mounted, all the files in the image are accessible just as though they were stored on a local drive.

There are also disadvantages to disk imaging:

- The image files are huge, typically 30% to 50% of the size of the drive being backed up. Files of this size are generally too large to be stored online or on removable media; they have to be stored on a hard drive.
- It's slow. Creating and restoring large image files can take hours. This presents problems when backing up files that are frequently changed.
- Since this is a local backup method, a separate offsite

copy is required to guard against such risks as theft and fire.

The backup method that works for me

Clearly, each backup method has its strengths and weaknesses. No single technique is ideal for all users.

In practice, I've found the best backup strategy for a given situation is often to use two or more different methods, each targeted at different kinds of data.

For example, online backup is ideal for small files and those that you want to access from more than one PC. On the other hand, local backup is well-suited to files that you update frequently. However, for backing up Windows, drive imaging is unbeatable.

Bearing this in mind, here's what I do:

- Every hour, I use the online service Jungle Disk to automatically back up my working notes and several other frequently updated files. That's not only for security, but also because I often need to access these files from another PC.
- Once a day, I back up my e-mail files, my Office documents, and my application settings to an external USB hard drive. This is automatically performed overnight using Genie Backup Manager.
- Once a week, I back up the same data to a second external hard drive that I store offsite for security. I also image my system drive weekly by creating a full backup copy of Windows using Acronis True Image. The image file is stored on the same hard drive I use for my daily backups. A second copy is kept with my offsite backup.

You can see that combining these three backup methods allows me to recover rapidly from just about any disaster without being excessively burdened by the backup process itself.

[1] <http://www.genie-soft.com/products/qbm/us/default.html>

[2] <http://www.ntius.com/default.asp>

[3] <http://www.handybackup.com/>

[4] <http://www.educ.umu.se/~cobian/cobianbackup.htm>

[5] <http://www.allwaysync.com/>

[6] <http://www.jungledisk.com/>

[7] <http://mozy.com>

[8] <http://www.carbonite.com>

[9] <http://www.acronis.co.uk/>

[10] <http://www.symantec.com/en/uk/norton/ghost>

[11] <http://www.runtime.org/driveimage-xml.htm>

Password Managers, Keep your login data handy.

From shopping and banking sites to network- and remote-access logins, we're inundated with requests to create and remember a plethora of passwords.

Fortunately, plenty of free tools help us store and organize our passwords in a single, secure location.

Although login aids can be more hindrance than help

If you counted the number of times you were prompted to enter a login ID and password in the course of a working day, you could be approaching double digits by your afternoon break.

Firefox, Internet Explorer, and other browsers offer to remember passwords for the sites you visit. However, your passwords are not always secure when stored in a browser — though Firefox is a safer bet, since you can encrypt its passwords with a master password.

Furthermore, you might need a tool that saves passwords for other programs, not just Web sites. If you're like me, relying on your memory is perilous, and writing your passwords on a piece of paper — even one you keep in your wallet or some other relatively secure location — is dangerous. That's where password-management utilities come in.

Password managers are small databases designed to help you manage the deluge of passwords needed to navigate your computer, network, and Internet needs. With the exception of RoboForm's browser toolbar, most of these programs have a similar interface and features, including but not limited to the following:

- A main window showing a list of your account names, passwords, URLs, and so forth
- Automatic password generation and optional password-expiration settings
- An option for attaching notes to any name and password entry
- The ability to copy a name and password to the clipboard without opening the dialog for each entry
- A means of launching a URL from the password manager
- A feature for clearing the clipboard and encrypting the password database
- The ability to print the database

The most cumbersome thing about password managers is that you have to cycle through multiple windows to use them. In most cases, the scenario goes like this:

Step 1. Select your account in the password manager window and copy the account name.

Step 2. Switch to your browser (or other application window) and paste in your name.

Step 3. Switch back to the password manager window and copy the account password.

Step 4. Switch to the browser yet again to paste in the password.

KeePass, Access Manager, and other programs simplify this process only slightly by letting you drag and drop the information between windows. However, you still have to switch between windows repeatedly.

There are so many password managers available that I had to limit my selection to those that offer a free version and also include a wealth of features. Not all of the programs claim to run under Vista, but they all worked fine in that operating system during my tests.

SIBER SYSTEMS ROBOFORM

£17.99 version scores 85/100

Free version scores 77/100

RoboForm takes a unique approach to password management, using as its main interface a toolbar that attaches to your Internet Explorer or Firefox browser. The program monitors your Web surfing and offers to save any name and password information you enter at a site. (You can also enter your Web IDs and passwords manually.)

Once the information is in the program, logging into a site is a simple matter of choosing a button or pop-up menu option from the toolbar to fill and submit the form. It's slick and easy, and it certainly beats the two-window shuffle required by other password managers.

To save even more clicks, place bookmarks to login pages in RoboForm's pop-up menu, which lets you navigate to the page and log in with a single click.

RoboForm doesn't just automate your logins. The program is also a great way to save such personal information as your name, address, phone numbers, and credit card numbers for automatically filling out online forms. Like your passwords, this information is encrypted and accessible from a master password, which is cached in memory so you need enter it only once per session.

As with the other programs, RoboForm lets you organize its "passcards" (what it calls each database record) into groups, if desired. You can also create multiple profiles for other purposes or other users.

Unlike the other applications, you can't attach custom notes to each item or account in RoboForm. However, the program's "Safenotes" feature lets you enter secure data for any purpose, such as ATM passwords.

Siber Systems also makes a version called RoboForm2Go that runs from a USB memory stick or flash drive. When you insert the device into a computer's USB slot, the RoboForm data is available to you. Removing it leaves no trace of your passwords.

For some, the biggest downside to RoboForm is its Web focus. The program is designed to work with Web forms and logins, not network passwords or encrypted folders (although you can always store that info in its Safenotes feature).

The free version of RoboForm limits you to ten passcards and two identities.

<http://www.roboform.com/>

KEEPASS PASSWORD SAFE

Free version scores 78/100

The open-source option for password management

For fans of open-source software, KeePass Password Safe is certified by the Open Source Initiative and has all the features I mentioned above plus a few extras. For example, KeePass supports keyfiles, a type of file that acts as a key or password and that you can put on a separate USB flash drive for safe-keeping. The program's search feature helps you find entries in its database. (Access Manager also offers this feature.)

You can even install KeePass on a USB flash drive and carry it with you wherever you go.

KeePass attempts to solve the window-shuffle problem by providing Auto-Type, a simple scripting system that lets you fill in and submit login data with a single keyboard shortcut. However, I was unable to get Auto-Type to work, and the explanation in the program's help system was no help in this regard.

As a security precaution, KeePass automatically clears the Clipboard ten seconds after you have used it to copy a name or password.

Several tools, including Access Manager, let you organize your passwords by creating custom groups. KeePass provides several built-in groups to start with and forces you to keep your passwords in at least one of these, even if it's the top "General" level.

This isn't a big deal most of the time, but if the group

becomes deselected in the tree pane on the left, you won't see any of your password info in the right pane. And this is annoyingly easy to do if you happen to click anywhere in the left pane to activate the window. To work around this, I put all my data into one group and then dragged the divider until the left pane almost disappeared.

Because the product is open-source, you don't have to worry about paying an upgrade fee to get more features. And you can download and install a number of third-party plug-ins to enhance it.

Despite its shortcomings, KeePass's many features make it the best freeware password manager I tested.

<http://keepass.info/>

CITI-SOFTWARE LTD ACCESS MANAGER

£13.95 version scores 80/100

Free version scores 72/100

Like RoboForm, Access Manager 2 comes in a free and paid version. The program's main window requires that you select an account name before you see the database record listing the password and any other info you've entered for it. This is the only password manager I looked at with this requirement.

For each account, you can enter not only a URL but also the name of a file, folder, or program that must be unlocked with a password. You can also open such an item from the Access Manager window.

To get data out of your database and into your login screen, Access Manager offers the option to have the password copied to the clipboard while you drag the account name. That way, you switch windows only once: drag to the name field, and then paste in the password field.

However, Access Manager's more unique features are found only in the £13.95 version — including the ability to run the program from a USB flash drive, use an on-screen keyboard to foil keyloggers, or delete files securely, just to name a few examples.

Access Manager is a solid product with strong appeal for those who use passwords for more than just Web sites. Still, you'll need to pay if you want to use the program in a commercial setting or if you need more advanced password-management features.

<http://www.accessmanager.co.uk/>

Windows 7

Despite Microsoft's best attempts to keep a lid on the next version of Windows — code-named Windows 7 — details about the new OS's features are slipping out. The early word is that the successor to Vista, which is due to ship in early 2010, won't be much different from Vista Service Pack 1.

"Starting with the next release of Windows, Windows Mail, Calendar, Contacts, Photo Gallery, and Movie Maker will no longer be available in the Windows operating system," a Microsoft spokesperson said in a statement e-mailed to Microsoft partners.

All these will be supplied by on-line alternatives as part of Windows Live Services. Also Windows 7 will almost certainly be 64 bit, which will require all new hardware and software if your PC is a few years old.

Support for XP ends in April 2009, so many people will skip Vista all together

Google's iPhone clone launched

The first mobile phone to be based on the Google Android open source software was unveiled on 29th September. It is expected to be available for purchase in October via T-Mobile for around £107. These phones should be direct competitors with the Apple iPhone:

The idea behind Android is to do for phone software what the open source Linux software has done for PCs. Developers of phone software can get at most of the core elements of the Android software to help them write better applications.

However, in launching Android, Google faces stiff competition from established players such as Nokia with its Symbian software and Microsoft with its Mobile operating system. More recently Apple has been gaining customers with its much hyped iPhone.

This follows hard on the heels of Google's new browser "Chrome" which is a direct competitor for Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Mozilla's Firefox. Early testing in our office has proved promising, although its hard to tell yet how secure the browser actually is, as its too early for any malware to be written to target the new browser.

Bill Gates should be worried, Google seem to able to do no wrong at the moment and although most financial analysts seem to think Microsoft is unstoppable, I'm old enough to remember when they said the same about IBM!

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