Cloud Backup: The Pros and Cons

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Introduction

This article focuses on Cloud Backup and considers its strengths and weaknesses.

You might store, backup, or synchronize data to the Cloud using a service like Google Cloud Storage, Apple iCloud, or Amazon S3, but if you think local backups are not necessary because of the Cloud, think again. As you define or revisit your backup strategy, ask yourself the following questions: Have I got a copy of my Cloud data? Where is my data stored in the Cloud? What happens when a Cloud service is subject to a security breach? Can I easily roll back to view a particular version of a file? Can I recover my data without online access?

In short, how can I ensure **I** have complete control and access of **my** data?

Backup Everything!

Protecting ourselves from data loss is more important than ever. Our lives are full of digital photos, important emails, and valuable data files of one kind or another - some personal, some work related.

We use different technologies every day to connect with our online world, both at home and in business. Our mobile phone might be an android device, we might have a family iPad, and at work we might use a PC. We are generally less concerned about brand or the kind of operating system a device has, and more focused on cost and ease of use. If a device feels right and we can afford it, we buy it and don't think too much about how it might be backed up until we start using it. If we work for an organization, they will handle hardware purchases and we may use a system we wouldn't personally choose. In other words, our digital life is messy and complicated…

Our data is spread across multiple devices and platforms and it is unlikely to be backed up in a coherent manner. A good backup strategy delivers a way to easily backup and recover all our data files from a single location so that we can access the data we need at any time, and without having to rely on an external online service.

The Cloud provides great benefits, but we also need to complement the convenience it gives us with the checks and balances of a comprehensive backup strategy. If you have a Windows computer, ~~the~~ SyncBack Touch (SBT) from 2BrightSparks used with SyncBackSE or SyncBackPro will remotely backup and recover data files from your computers and devices, whether they be Windows, Apple OSX, iOS, or Android. The only backup strategy truly worth contemplating is one that backs up everything.

What is Cloud Backup?

There are many places you can back up your data files to. One of the simplest forms of computer backup is copying your files to an external drive using a USB cable. The next is to backup over a network - if the drive you are backing up to is in a different location, then all the better as this decreases the risk of your files being potentially subject to theft, fire, and flood etc..

The other place you might backup to is the Cloud. A Cloud backup is where a remote, online, or managed service provides users with a system for backing up, storing, and recovering data files. This is part of the eco-system called "Cloud Computing" which Wikipedia defines as:

> *"The delivery of computing as a service rather than a product, whereby shared resources, software, and information are provided to computers and other devices as a utility (like the electricity grid) over a network (typically the Internet)."*

The Windows backup software program [SyncBackPro](#) is a great help in the backup process: you define what files you want backed up and where you want them backed up to (including the Cloud). Simply set up a schedule then let the software automatically do the heavy lifting for you.

Over the last few years and as bandwidth has increased, a growing number of free cloud storage services have become available. Be mindful however that online storage is not the same as backup. You might for example use Dropbox or Mozy to store all your files, but this is not a backup, it is simply a place to store files. You will still need to backup those Dropbox files in a different location to ensure they are always recoverable should disaster strike.

Now we've got the basics covered, let's turn to those questions we touched on in the introduction.

Have I got a copy of my Cloud data?

Always be aware that your access to any files stored, backed up, or synced in the Cloud is reliant not only on the robustness and availability of the Cloud service, but also on your own connectivity. Always maintain a local backup copy of your data. For those on a tight budget you'll find free backup software programs like [SyncBackFree](#) that will help protect you against data loss by copying to a local drive.

Where is my data stored in the Cloud?

Cloud services are great when they're available. You switch on your device and, presto! The document you were working on at home earlier in the day is automatically synchronized, and now it's on your office computer, thanks to Exchange, iCloud etc., but where exactly are your files stored? Perhaps you say to yourself that they're in some vast, highly secure server-farm tucked away on a remote island, protected by guard dogs, razor wire and a crack black ops team. Perhaps you don't think of where the files are at all and simply trust that a large company like Google, Amazon or Apple know what they're doing and will store your files safely with the millions they invest in their Cloud infrastructure. There's no doubt they will try, but the bald truth is that you will never know where your files are actually stored, and remember, your access to them is only granted by an external service via the thin line of a user name and password.

Use the Cloud to store files, but **always** have an additional backup that you have independent physical access to.

What happens when a Cloud service is subject to a security breach?

Despite all the attention and resources Cloud services and online data storage providers devote to making their systems safe and secure, the Cloud is not a closed domain. As long as you have access to your Cloud service (and you need that otherwise the provision would be pointless), there's a risk of a security breach. The vulnerability is not so much in the Cloud service provider, but rather the access you have to their service. To counter this vulnerability and with the potential event of a security breech in mind, implement a local backup policy that is in addition to your Cloud backup.

Can I easily roll back to view a particular version of a file?

Cloud backup services vary. The more storage, bandwidth and customization you want, the more expensive your monthly subscription will be. You may for example want a particular version of a file you backed up a few weeks ago, but you might not have paid for that extra facility. By using a backup software program like SyncBackPro, you have the ability to automatically create versions of your files. Once again, consider maintaining both online synchronization using your Cloud storage, and an offline backup.

Can I recover my data without online access?

Backing up and recovering versions of your files on a local drive is faster, more convenient, and "always on". Don't replace your Cloud backup, but get the best cloud storage you can, then complement it with offline storage that you can physically maintain.

Optimize your control and lower your risk

Data privacy is crucial. Organizations like hospitals, corporations and governments recognize data handling as a critical responsibility, but the importance of maintaining the privacy and integrity of personal and work related data now concerns everyone.

If you interact online you will relinquish some control over what happens with your data, however by using both Cloud and local data storage facilities, you can implement a backup system that reduces your overall risk of your data being lost, corrupted, or compromised.

Conclusion

Faster bandwidth helps deliver greater convenience as more and more of us use the Cloud to work and store the increasing mountain of digital information that pours from every corner of the globe, but alongside our daily use of the Cloud we need to ensure our valuable data is also backed up locally so it is easily recoverable, even when we're not connected to the Cloud or Internet.

Take a long hard look at the different ways you connect with the world (through smart phones, Android and iOS devices, OSX, and Windows computers), and define, then implement a backup strategy that takes account of your entire data eco-system.