

Jewish Community Voice

Volume 68, No. 6 • November 5, 2008 • 7 Cheshvan 5769

Published by the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey • www.jewishvoicesnj.org

November 5, 2008

Earthquakes, fires and floods—saving your data after the mayhem

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The recent terrible extremes of weather, and the natural and manmade disasters circling the globe make this a good time to consider the backup and recovery strategy for your data. No matter how meticulous you are about keeping backup copies, all of us eventually get caught without a backup.

The only thing worse than not having a backup is making one but keeping it in the same place as the computer that you're backing up. Fires, floods, hurricanes, and other disasters can destroy both copies as easily as destroying one copy. One good approach is to make two DVDs of each batch of data. Keep one in the backup data binder in your office, but also put one in a safe deposit box.

There are a couple of new options that make offsite backups somewhat easier for consumers, and a heavy duty onsite option for businesses that will protect your data from fire.

The offsite options are two online services, Carbonite.com and Mozy.com. Each service offers a downloadable backup tool that scans your computer and copies your documents and other data files to an online, secure backup system. Both offer unlimited data storage online. Carbonite charges \$49.95 a year for this, and Mozy gets \$4.95 a month. Mozy offers a free storage option for up to 2gb of data. Carbonite offers a 15-day free trial, but no free storage option.

The downside of both services is the slow upload speeds still plaguing DSL and cable systems. We loaded the Carbonite backup software and selected the default setting, which copies the computer's desktop and My Documents folder to the backup site. It took three days to complete the initial upload of files. Carbonite warns users that it could take days to upload large quantities of data, so these services may not be appropriate if you have lots of high resolution JPEG or RAW photos, or videos that you want to back up. Files you upload to either service are encrypted on the backup server, using strong encryption software similar to what financial institutions are supposed to be using.

For businesses that might need to have quicker access to large amounts of backed up data, FireKing (<http://tinyurl.com/6cn488>) has released the MediaVault HD product. This is a fireproof vault-like container housing either a 250gb or 500gb hard drive that connects to your computer by

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a simple USB data cable. The MediaVault has received Underwriters Laboratories Class 125 1-hour fire rating. This means the enclosure will maintain a temperature of no more than 125°F for the hard drives inside it while being exposed to a 1700°F fire on the outside.

"The catastrophes just over this past year have once again underscored the need for people to realize that in this increasingly digital world, there needs to be data protection, and especially data protection against fire," said Bill Rush, product manager for the MediaVault HD. "To be able to keep the temperature under 125° puts us in a class by ourselves."

Most hard drive manufacturers advise keeping the drives from being exposed to temperatures above 158°F, Rush said, so the MediaVault protection offers a margin of safety below that level.

While online backup services are technologically competent, Rush confirmed our experience uploading data to Carbonite and pointed out that it would take many days of continuous download to recover the uploaded data again. That could be devastating for a business trying to recover from a disaster.

"Time is of the essence," Rush noted, citing a Gartner Group study that more than half of small businesses that have fires end up going out of business.

(You can hear more of my conversation with Bill Rush in the CompuSchmooze podcast, at www.compuschmooze.com.) steve@compuschmooze.com