OrganizingPhotos.net Backup Basics

What you need to know about backing up your digital photo collection.

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Backup Basics Part 1: The Different Types of Backups



Backing up is one of the most confusing parts of keeping your photos safe, and it's by far one of the most requested topics by my clients, which is what prompted me to write this post. I feel that I can't really remind people to create a backup of their photo collections unless I have provided clear instructions and help on how to do that, so here's the first entry in my new series on how to best back up your digital photos.

What Backup Service Should I Use?

How should I back up my photos? Do I have to upgrade my cloud account? Do I just drag and drop? What type of storage should I back up to? I don't get it. Can you just do it for me?

These are some of the questions I have heard from my clients this past year in regards to backing up their photo collections. This is not an easy topic to explain because there are so many "it depends" factors that can influence the answer.

As a rule, before I give any answers at all, I usually start with an in-depth analysis of what's going on in my clients' digital workflows. It depends on what types of files they are using, what computer they are on, their operating system, the size of their collections, their comfort level with technology, and so on. And it usually ends with a "*Yes, I can do that for you*" reassurance, simply because of the vastness of this topic. My answer to any client will always be a "*Yes, I can do that for you*" but it should also be something that everyone knows how to do on their own.

Enter this post.

There are many different ways to back up your photo collection, from manual copying to automatically uploading everything to the cloud, so it's no wonder that my clients are unsure of what is best to do, which is why I wanted to write something that not only my clients, but also my readers can refer back to when they are looking into selecting different methods (or services).

So let's start with the most basic question:

What is a Backup, Really?

A backup is defined as copying data from one place to another, so that in the event of a tech failure, natural disaster, or other loss, you can recover those files. This is different from syncing, which is when you balance information between multiple locations or accounts. When people talk about backups, they usually mean copying stuff from one place to another, for example from a computer to a hard drive. It gets confusing with the cloud storage accounts because some people use them as permanent backups, and others use them to sync files and folders. You can do either one, as long as you are clear on which option you have chosen. If you do both, that's when you might get into trouble.

Different Types of Backup Methods

There are many types of backups: Full, Synthetic-Full, Incremental, Incremental-Forever, Differential, Mirrored...Is it a wonder people get confused? Umm, no.

Here's the gist of it:

Full Backups

A full backup is where all your folders and files are backed up every time. The backup becomes a snapshot in time, and you can easily go back to recover something from an earlier version. Full backups take up more space because they include all files every time, even if nothing has changed. It will copy everything, every time.

Mirrored Backups

A mirrored backup is exactly the same as a full backup, except for the fact that your files aren't compressed, so it becomes even easier to restore single files on their own (unlike a full backup where your files may be in a zip file).

Incremental Backups

An incremental backup is how most cloud backups work. It backs up in full once, and then just records the changes (the ones made since the last backup you made, even if it wasn't a complete and full backup). It's quicker, but tricker to restore because you need to know what day something changed in order to get the right version. Let's say you started your new backup system on a Saturday, and you completed your full backup that day. Then on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, you made changes to it. How would it back up? Well, on Sunday, it would back up the files that had changed since Saturday. On Monday, it would back up the files that had changed since Sunday. On Tuesday, it would back up the changes made since Monday. And so on.

Differential Backups

A differential backup is similar because it also backs up in full once, and then only records changes. But the difference is that it records all the changes made since the last full backup. This means that if you started the system on a Saturday, and made changes to it on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, that backup would back up everything since the last full backup (on Saturday). This would happen every time, causing it to grow in size pretty fast. The great part about it though is that you wouldn't have to wonder what you needed to restore.

Other Types of Backups

Are there more varieties? I'm afraid so, but you probably don't have to worry about them too much.

Chances are that you won't come into contact with these types of backups unless you work someplace that handles a lot of data, and it's my sincere hope that if you got that job, you know what you're doing... so I won't go into much details on these last two:

A **Synthetic-Full** backup is basically when a server combines full backups with a series of incremental backups to recreate a new full backup. Similarly, and **Incremental-Forever** backup is when a server uses an incremental backup system, but does it faster and with a wider availability of data, so that it can restore to a full backup automatically

Why Should I Care about What Type of Backup it is?

Here's why I think it's important for you to understand how syncing and backing up works:

Perhaps you don't work with a lot of data, and maybe you aren't even that much of a techie. That's OK, but if that's the case, you have probably outsourced your backups, and you may be paying for some sort of service that does it for you. Right?

Let's say that you are using a service that backs up using full backups, and they do it the first of the month on a schedule. That could be great because they do full backups, so you know what you have at all times. There's no confusion. But what if you lose something on day 30? You could potentially lose a whole month's worth of stuff. Not so good.

Fortunately, most backup services use incremental backups, so the scenario above is rare, but here's another pitfall:

Backing up to the cloud usually takes a long time, especially the first time, so what if you lose something before the backup is finished? It could take days for a cloud service to backup your full library, so be sure to check the progress to see what's happening there.

And while you're at it, check to see what files are being backed up! Believe it or not, some backup services exclude certain file extensions by default, and if you never checked the settings, you're out of luck.

My Backup Recommendation

In my opinion (and you may have another one), a true backup shouldn't sync. Unless you are only adding to it (via an incremental or differential backup), that sort of defeats the purpose, doesn't it? You've created the backup to protect that data, so why put it in jeopardy with a bunch of syncs? It makes no sense to me. I think it's a better idea to instead update it from time to time, either by carefully adding the newer files, or by redoing the whole backup manually. I'm a big believer in doing full mirrored backups locally because in my experience, they reduce the chance of errors significantly, and there's no guesswork as to what you have. It may take longer, and be more work, but at least you can be sure that it's all there.

Let me also point out that you should have more than one backup of your files, but we'll get into that more in another blog post!

I would encourage you to find out what type of backup system your service is using, so that you can adequately prepare to backup manually in between. If you don't see it listed clearly in your selected service's FAQ section, send an email to their customer service to check on exactly what type of system they use. It's your right as the consumer to know, and it's your responsibility as the caretaker of your family history to understand exactly how safe it is. Agree or disagree?

Do you now what type of system you're using? If you do, why did you select it? Let me know!

Backup Basics Part 2: What's Your Backup Strategy?



Welcome back to this series on backing up your memories! In this post, we're tackling how to develop a backup strategy that you can implement, and actually remember! Be sure to read part one about the different types of backups before you jump into this section!

What's Your Backup Strategy?

Now that you understand some of the different types of backups, you need to **pick a backup strategy** for your memories. This is the overall workflow that guides your backup decisions, so if you don't have one yet, put creating one at the top of your to-do list right now. You need to have a plan for *when* to backup, *how* to backup, and *where to store* the backups, so that if something goes wrong, you can go into recovery mode quickly. It may seem like an unnecessary step, but just like in any organizing endeavor, having a plan is **game-changing**.

Creating Your Own Backup Strategy

So how do you pick a good backup strategy?

Start by defining where your main photo hub lives, and then work your way outwards towards other devices and systems.

A backup strategy doesn't have to be complicated, but it's a good idea to have it written down (perhaps in your organized household / family binder?), in case someone else needs to access your memories at some point. Your backup strategy should answer the following questions in detail:

- Where is the main Digital Photo Hub (DPH) located?
- What is on the main DPH, and in what format?
- How often is the main DPH changed, and how?
- Where is Copy #1 stored, and in what format?
- How can Copy #1 be accessed (cloud, address, passwords etc.)?
- Where is Copy #2 stored, and in what format?
- How can Copy #2 be accessed (cloud, address, passwords etc.)?
- How often are Copies #1 and #2 Updated?
- Is there a specific schedule for backups?

Creating a backup strategy sounds like a lot of work, but it's not that bad. It's really just a few sentences that defines the workflow you have created. I feel it's important to write things down because it forces you to get clear on what you're doing and why. The good news is that you don't have to start from scratch. There are plenty of ideas out there in cyberspace that you could borrow from and make your own. The most common recommendation is the 3-2-1 method.

What Exactly is the 3-2-1 Method?

The 3-2-1 method is a a strategy that long has been touted by the U.S. Government as the best way to backup your personal files. Most backup services recommend it, as do most institutions.

Here's the gist, as quoted in a report by the *Department of Homeland Security*.

3 – Keep 3 copies of any important file: 1 primary and 2 backups.
2 – Keep the files on 2 different media types to protect against different types of hazards.
1 – Store 1 copy offsite (e.g., outside your home or business facility).

In a nutshell, your files should live on a Master (i.e. your digital photo hub) and you should create two separate copies, one of which needs to live elsewhere.

I think the 3-2-1 method is a good general starting point. An example of a good setup would be a main computer, two external hard drives made by different manufacturers, one using an automated backup system (like Time Machine), and the other one being reserved for manual backups. Both drives would then be stored in two different places, away from the main computer. Extra points for adding a cloud backup, which is easy (and nowadays not very expensive). Maybe you already have a similar system going on at home, but you just haven't made it official?

Different Media, or Different Devices?

The hardest part of applying the 3-2-1 method is deciding on which two media types to use. It's no secret that I prefer external hard drives over other storage options, so my own strategy involves multiple hard drives. In my opinion, there are few storage media options that can rival external hard drives in terms of capacity and reliability, so rather than picking two different formats, I use different devices instead. Sometimes, you have to interpret these guidelines your own way.

So should you pick two different media, or two different devices? Only you can decide, but try to keep your entire collection together in one piece. You want to be able to stay organized, so scratch DVDs, CDs, BluRays, and flash drives from the list. No matter how great the quality is, they just don't have the capacity, not to mention that they can easily break, scratch, and get lost. Also important - DO NOT open multiple free 2GB cloud storage accounts just to avoid the monthly charge. You will just end up confused as to where a certain photo is stored. From an organizing standpoint, you're better off keeping everything together as one complete backup.

What Does Off-Site Really Mean?

The idea behind the off-site part of the 3-2-1 strategy is to have the devices stored in different places in case something happens to the first location. We're talking fire, theft, natural disaster - use your imagination. This is a conundrum for many people who may not have access to second location, so you'll have to do your best here. The question then becomes: what location is safe enough? I usually recommend having at least one backup stored in a different city, state, or country. Why? Because if a tornado shows up, it usually destroys the entire town, not just one home. This will vary based on where you live, so make an educated guess on what dangers your memories face.

For me, it's easy. I store some copies in my office in the U.S., and some copies in my office in Sweden. That's about as far apart as it can get. The downside is, of course, that I have to remember to update them when I travel. They aren't as easily accessible to me at all times, but knowing that I have family members with computers who can access it all, makes me feel pretty confident about this arrangement. You have define what off-site means to you. If the best you can do is safe-deposit box in your home town, that's better than keeping everything at home.

Should You Backup Manually, or Automate?

There are two different schools of thought on this, and it varies based on who you ask. The first one argues that human errors happen more often than computer errors, so you're "better off" automating everything and not doing any manual backups yourself. No humans, no mistakes. The other side argues the opposite: that you have more control with a manual backup, and will remember more clearly what's backed up where. Technology is unreliable, and who wants to fully trust their computer?

I use a mix of both. This may surprise those of you who know me well because I'm always in favor of automating as much as possible in order to stay productive, but I actually don't advocate skipping manual backups. In fact, I do many manual backups in my business - all the time. Is it a perfect system? No. It takes time, but I feel like I have more control over the backup when I do it myself rather than leaving it all to my computer.

Now, don't get me wrong. I love using automated systems too, and that's because I have a lot of data to backup. I care for both my own memories, any many of my clients' memories as well, so I have to err on the side of caution. Plus, it's nice to know that even if I forget, my computer backed up everything automatically. It can get confusing knowing which version is the most current one, but I solve that problem by labeling my hard drives in great detail (with dates), and completing all of the backups at once.

My Recommendations Vary

I don't recommend the 3-2-1 method for all clients because I feel it depends on their needs. What files do they have? Are those files important? Can they live without them? If the answer to the last question is yes, then the 3-2-1 method is overkill. If the answer is no, then I don't believe the 3-2-1 method is enough. If they have priceless photographs, then we choose a customized backup strategy based on what they tell me. It might be the 3-2-1 method, but more often than not, it's more like a 4-4-2 system.

Will the 3-2-1 Method Work for You?

The 3-2-1 method is not for everyone, so you might come up with something different. You have to figure out what type of strategy will work for you. Will you use different computers? Different hard drives? Cloud backups? How often will you back up, and how? The idea is to not have a situation where there is a single point of failure. Make a commitment to your precious memories today to create an official strategy that you can follow and others can understand. There's no harm in going above and beyond if you have files you can't afford to lose. Better safe than sorry, right?

Do you follow the 3-2-1 method or have you created your own backup strategy?

Backup Basics Part 3: Why Syncing isn't Always such a Good Idea



For this third post in my series on Backup Basics, I'm tackling the issue of syncing vs. backing up. What's the difference, really? and why must you know the difference? I have an acquaintance whose story I have decided to share with all of you because it's a lesson for all of us in digital file management, and what can easily go wrong when you don't pay attention. Read on, friend...

Dropbox Demotion

Brian was hired as an independent contractor by a large corporation to help manage a project for a very important client. He would be working with a team of other consultants, all responsible for different parts of the project. The team had decided to a set up a Dropbox for Business account to store and share all their files because many of the consultants worked in different locations, and as such needed to collaborate in real time.

Brian was eager to get started, so he accepted the team's invite to share the folder, and proceeded to install the Dropbox app on his computer. After a while, he noticed that his computer was running a bit slowly. It was a pretty new computer, so he thought it a bit strange. The next day, he noticed that the Dropbox folder was full of files he didn't recognize, and when he took a closer look, he realized that the computer had been running slow because it has synced all the files his team members were working on onto his computer. As you can imagine, the size of the team's Dropbox account was quite large for such a big project. There were so many files that Brian didn't need, so why keep them on his computer? He didn't want his computer to run slowly. "What a waste of space!," he thought, and started deleting.

Can You Spot the Problem?

If you're thinking that he shouldn't have deleted anything, you'd be right. Brian made changes to a shared folder that synced with the Dropbox cloud, and deleted all those files from the team's account. Not only that, but he sparked a chain reaction that in turn continued to sync down the line, deleting the same files from all of the team member's devices as well. Ouch. It became a logistical nightmare as people started to wonder where their files had gone. Panic set in.

Fortunately, Dropbox backs up all data and gives you the ability to restore deleted files within 30 days, so the team did get their files back eventually, but it was a speed bump that derailed the project for a number of days. It took an extra administrative effort to restore everything for all the team members, and needless to say they weren't happy.

"You're Supposed to Know This"

Surprisingly, no one had guided the team members on the ins and outs of dropbox, what to do, and more importantly, what **not** to do. The expectation was that everyone should know how syncing works. I would imagine this to be true in most corporate environments nowadays. Online collaboration is common for teams, and I guess most people just assumes everyone knows this stuff, which brings me to the reason I wrote this post:

Don't delete files unless you understand how syncing works.

As you may have guessed, Brian lost his job, and at the time of my conversation with him, he was still looking for a new one. Lesson learned for him. New blog post for me.

What is Syncing... Really?

Understanding the difference between backing up your files and syncing your files is something that can be extremely confusing, but I would highly recommend that you take the time to learn about it, so you can pick the best options for you.

In a nutshell, syncing is **balancing your information**. When you have two or more places in which to keep your information (for example one phone, one tablet, and one cloud account), and you want that information to look exactly the same everywhere, you use syncing to accomplish that goal.

Syncing = Efficient Workflow

A good example of this from my own life is Evernote. As an *Evernote Certified Consultant*, I use obviously Evernote A LOT! In my business, I need to be able to see the same notes across all my devices, and always have access to the latest version of the file, and syncing is the way to do that.

Let's say I'm with a client, and that client gives me some notes on how to handle her photos. I type it into the Evernote account on my phone, and it automatically syncs when I'm connected to the internet, so that even if I look at the file on a computer or a tablet in my home office, it will look the same (i.e. updated). Any changes I make to my notes are reflected across the board, no matter what I do (deleting, adding etc), and everything will look the same on all my devices (in all locations) without me having to do any more work. From a pure workflow standpoint, it's highly efficient.

When to Use Selective Syncing

Brian's story is a prime example of when to use*selective syncing*. This is a great option for when you are working with a team, a client, or a friend, and you don't need all the files that are shared with you. You can deselect the folders you don't need and keep them from syncing to your computer, thereby freeing up a lot of space that those folders would otherwise eat up.

Would've, Could've, Should've

What Brian should have done was to go into the settings to adjust what files his computer would get; essentially put blinders on the rest of the folders. That would have removed them from his computer, but still kept them available to everyone online, and it would have had no effect on the main account and his team members' devices. Another option would have been to request only the files he needed in separate shared folder (but that's not always an option when working in teams).

Alas, the selective sync is a simple adjustment that would have saved Brian the embarrassment, and the hassle of trying to find a new job. I could write a whole tutorial on how to do all of this (and believe me, I'd love to), but Dropbox already has one available right here, so I'd rather you just get it straight from the source, especially since they update it every now and then.

Syncing in the Cloud

As you can see, syncing can be tricky. Do new files replace new ones? Who has access to what? There are so many settings that can affect your files, especially when using the cloud. Are your files truly safe?

Let's say you want to create a cloud backup. You decide that Dropbox looks pretty good, and after upgrading to a 100 GB account, you upload all your photos there. They're safe, right? Well, it depends. If you are just logging on to your account from their website to pay your files a visit every now and then, then yes, they're probably pretty safe (unless Dropbox themselves decide to close your account for any reason - check their terms of service!). But...if you have downloaded their app to your computer and have your syncing feature turned on, then no, your files aren't that safe.

Here's Why:

Syncing Doesn't Equal Backing Up

Any changes you make to a Dropbox folder on your computer will reflect in the cloud. That means if you delete all the photos from the folder on your computer, then you are also deleting them from the cloud. Think of it as holding up a mirror to the sky. And yes, you have a few days to restore the files if you needed to (unless you have paid for extended coverage), but what if you don't pay attention and forget to check? Do you really want to go through the stress? I wouldn't want to.

A neat way to get around this is to avoid having the installed app on your computer, or at least have one backup of your files in a place that doesn't sync. Syncing errors aren't uncommon, and after all, we're all human, so mistakes will happen. The key is to have a backup of your files somewhere else, so you can recover them if you make a mistake. Brian's team didn't have a backup, which is baffling for such a large company.

It's Not Just Dropbox

In closing, let me state that I am not against Dropbox in any way. A lot of my friends, clients, and colleagues use Dropbox, and have nothing but praise for it. I have an account as well, and I have never had a problem with their service, so this post isn't meant to devalue their service in any way. In fact, most cloud storage options work similarly, so you can take your pick and apply this lesson to any one of them. It just so happens that was the service provider Brian's team had picked.

I don't want you to make any mistakes with your photo collection, and I want you to understand the little nuances that can make big differences in your file management workflow. Are Your Files Safe from Syncing Errors?

Backup Basics Part 4: Setting Up Automatic Backups



Let's keep the backup series going! Today, I want all of you to look into automatic backups! Don't worry - it's not as scary as it sounds! If you're on a Mac, it involves setting up Time Machine with a few clicks. If you're on a PC, it involves trying to navigate your settings, screaming at your computer for a little while, trying again, giving up, and then outsourcing the task to a third-party service... Let's get started!

Why Automatic Backups Rock

When you create your digital photo workflow, it's a good idea to set up automatic backups. As I mentioned in this blog post, I like checking that everything is where it's supposed to be manually, but there's no denying that automatic backups rock. It's a safety net for your computer, and peace of mind for you.

The most successful backup strategies combine several different methods of backing up, and automatic backups will be an important part of your overall plan. If you use them right, they will also power-charge your productivity.

Here are my main reasons for using automatic backups:

1. They Take the Pressure off Me to Be Perfect

Newsflash! I'm not perfect. I make mistakes like everyone else, and since I have to deal with photos that aren't my own, automatic backups help lower the risk of losing it all and getting sued. Wouldn't want that to happen! I try (as much as possible) to stick to a good backup schedule, but sometimes life gets in the way. Automatic backups help me stay productive because things get done even if I can't get to them.

2. They Help Me Stay Productive by Consolidating My Digital Photo Streams

I love having an efficient workflow, and automatic backups actually consolidate my digital photo streams. Think about it. Photos come at you from so many different places that it's hard to keep up. So why try? I back up photos from several different accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Gmail, Evernote, Airtable, Wordpress, etc.) by funneling all of them into one cloud service automatically. All I have to do is download everything periodically from my cloud service provider and put it on my DPH. Can you imagine trying to keep up with all those accounts individually? Nope, not for me. Automating that. One small setup for me, one giant leap for my digital photos.

3. Why Not? They're Free to Use!

Many automatic backup options are completely free to use, so why not take advantage? They either come with your operating system as-is, or you can sign up for third-party services that let you do a whole bunch of stuff without spending a dime. Sure, you *may* have to sacrifice an external hard drive (depending on the service), but I think my files are worth it, and so should you. It's a small price to pay.

Automatic Backups with Time Machine

If you own a Mac, using *Time Machine* is your best option for local backup automation. This is a feature of most Apple operating systems (OS X Leopard and later), and you can set it up with just a few clicks. Once it's set up, Time Machine will continuously run in the background and backup your entire machine. It keeps hourly backups for the last 24 hours, daily backups for the last month, and weekly backups for the last few months. Time Machine uses an incremental backup system, i.e. it backs up in full once, and then only checks for changes. This makes it easier to restore something from a certain point in time... as long as you know what that ideal point in time was.

To set it up, you need a storage device that can fit all of your data. You can't save it to your machine because the whole point is to keep the backup separately. If you Mac crashed and your backup was on it, it wouldn't do you much good, would it? Nope. Gotta keep it separate. If you're a small business, you might consider setting up Time Machine with *OS X Server*, but for personal use, the easiest route is to use an external hard drive. Fan of Apple products? Look into getting a *Time Capsule* (it's wireless, y'all!), but know that it works just as well with a regular hard drive.

Time Machine backs up **everything** - that's right, your whole system - so if anything happened to your computer, you could restore it fast. #Awesome! It's pretty easy to set it up, but for those of you who want a little more guidance, my new ecourse DPO PRO will guide you in detail.

Automatic Backups with Windows File History

The PC option for backing up your files is called *Windows File History* (Windows 8 or later). It's works nicely for your files, but it fails in one key element: it doesn't backup your entire machine. If your computer crashed, you would be able to restore your files, but not the operating system itself and your programs.

Nonetheless, Widows File History works kinda like Time Machine. You designate the place you would like to back up to (an external hard drive works fine), and then Windows automatically backs up your files to that drive. By default, it pulls data from the following folders: Documents, Music, Pictures, Videos, plus any folders on your Desktop, and offline OneDrive folders. You can add folders and remove folders if you want to customize your backup. The whole point is that File History lets you go back and restore earlier versions of your files if you, let's say, accidentally delete or overwrite something. If you set it to *AutoPlay*, it automatically scans your machine for changes without you having to do anything else. Pretty good.

File History keeps your files safe, but what about your operating system, and all your executable files?

System-Wide Backups in Windows

Windows is tricky for my clients because there are a lot of options to choose from, and it's sometimes difficult to know exactly what backup option to pick. The most frustrating thing over the last few years has been Microsoft's inability to make up its mind about what backup options to offer. In Windows 7, there was *Backup and Restore*. Then that went away when Windows 8 introduced *File History*. Windows 10 brought back the *Backup and Restore* option, but also kept *File History*. Over the years, there's been a slew of different backup and recovery options, including *Backup & Restore, Refresh This PC, Reset This PC, File History, System Restore, Recovery Drive Creator, System Repair Disc, Azure...and the list goes on. Seriously Microsoft? Way to confuse people.*

Throughout all of this, there was yet another option called *Create System Image*. To backup an entire machine in Windows, you could create a system image of the machine, i.e. a snapshot of what the computer looked like at a specific point in time. This option is still available, but it's now buried inside the control panel. Depending on what version of Windows you are using, you may be faced with different ways to get there, so for the average user, it's not very intuitive. It's a good idea to use this option together with File History, because it can't restore individual files, just the system as a whole. Why separate systems? Beats me. Hopefully, Microsoft will consider creating a more encompassing tool with future operating system updates. For now, we're stuck with this.

Automatic Backups Using an Third-Party Service

If you find that Microsoft's "File History / Create System Image / Backup & Restore" recipe doesn't quite gel with you, you can always use a third-party service, like Crashplan. Crashplan is actually a cloud backup service, but they offer you a way to backup your machine to a local drive for free, which in essence, becomes a system just like Time Machine. You can use their service no matter what computer you're on, and all that's required is an account and a designated external hard drive. You can find out more about that option by visiting Crashplan here. Even if you have an automatic backup system going already, you can use their system too...I mean, what's the harm? The only caveat is storage; you'd need a second dedicated hard drive, or a subscription to their cloud service.

** **One important reminder** (whether you're using Crashplan or another third-party service): Double-check which files exactly are being backed up! Some default settings don't always include all of your executable files. Check with your backup provider!

Automatic Backups of Your Social Media Feeds

Do you back up your social media feeds? You should. They inevitably contain important photos as well, and it's a good idea to keep those photos along with your other files on your DPH.

As I mentioned earlier in the post, one of the benefits of automation is being able to funnel different photo streams into one place. I highly recommend you doing this when it comes to your online life. In this day and age, almost anything online can be automated - you just have to figure out what works best for you. The two most obvious photo-filled social media platforms are Facebook and Instagram, but also think about email attachments, or any other place that's a source of digital photos for you and your family.

Funneling is Fun

If you're regularly posting to your Instagram account from your phone, or even using a scheduling tool (like Later) which pulls from your phone, your photos are routed through your camera roll. In that case, you can just process those photos with the rest of them (the ones that you don't post). If you're using a scheduling tool that posts from your computer, like Grum (or if you just want to have an organized backup of your Instagram feed), you can use an API tool like Zapier, IFTT, or even Scrounga to backup your feed to a cloud service.

The same goes for Facebook, your email, and most other online accounts. You could manually download everything from each individual account, but who'd want to do that? That's too much work. Funnel your new stuff automatically, and then download everything in a zip file from a single point in the cloud instead. It's less work, and you don't have to worry about forgetting.

No worries if you didn't catch all of this...I have a separate blog post coming on this topic.

Well, you've heard my reasons for using automatic backups! What are yours?

Backup Basics Part 5: Choosing the Right Cloud



In this last post of my Backup Basics series, we'll be taking a closer look at cloud storage. What it is? Why would you want to use one? And what you should be looking for in a good service provider?

What is the Cloud?

The "cloud" is simply a fancy term for "a bunch of servers." In essence, the cloud (and the internet) is made up of a bunch of servers that are stored in different places, and all connected to each other through networks. Google Photos, Amazon Prime Photos, Dropbox Photos, and Forever are good examples of cloud-based storage providers. When you create a cloud account with a company, you're paying for a little slice of space on one of those servers, and you access that space through your internet browser. You're basically renting (or buying) a virtual storage locker. One of the biggest content network providers (i.e. server homes) is Amazon S3 (*yes, that Amazon*), which thousands of professional companies use, for example Smugmug, and up until very recently, Dropbox.

Pros of Using the Cloud

There are a lot of pros to using cloud backups, and in my opinion, the pros outweigh the cons... if you choose wisely.

Easy Setup

Setting up a cloud account is pretty simple. For one, you don't have to invest in any equipment. You don't have to pick out a hard drive, and you don't really have to know how to set it up. The company will guide you through all of that. And if you need more help, guess what? They have an FAQ section, and a customer service phone number for you to call. Most cloud service providers will also give you the option to implement an automatic backup system right away. Set it up once, and it keeps running in the background. All you have to understand is how your files are being backed up, so that you can create an efficient backup strategy.

It's an Off-Site Backup

Another pro of the cloud backup is that it's off-site, meaning that even if something happened to your computer, nothing would happen to your cloud account. You use your computer to access it, but the cloud and your computer are not connected to each other. Most cloud providers have triple-backup security on their data, which means they use servers that are located in different parts of the world. It's unlikely that all of a company's servers will malfunction at the same time, unless there is a major global meltdown.

Cloud Collaboration Works

The cloud is great for collaboration, and especially for someone like me whose family is scattered over several different continents. The cloud makes it easy for me to share memories with family members in other places, and to collaborate with them in real time. As long as there is an internet connection, we're in business.

The Convenience is Unbeatable

The cloud is amazingly convenient. I love being able to curate photo collections with complete disregard for my physical location. Have I organized photos on a beach? Yep. In a foreign city? Of course. At the airport? You bet. Can't do that without the cloud. I love that I can travel anywhere and still have everything I need with me.

Cons of Using the Cloud

The cons of cloud backups are few, but they are important. Apart from the global meltdown scenario, here are a few things to think about when you're choosing your service provider:

Premium Pricing

There will usually be a monthly subscription cost, or a larger fixed cost, to set up your account. The market value of a gigabyte (GB) is much higher in the cloud compared to a local storage device. As an example, buying a 1TB (1000 GB) external hard drive on Amazon will cost you less than \$100, but buying a 1TB cloud storage account can cost you well over \$1000. Some of the more premium accounts go for up to \$4000/TB. Huge difference.

Shut-downs, Mergers, & Acquisions

It's not uncommon for cloud companies to shut down, or get acquired by another company. This happened just recently with Copy.com, and it's happened to countless cloud services in recent years. The market is still settling. A recent study from Gartner showed that over 25% of cloud service providers shut down within a few years for various reasons. If your service goes belly up, what happens to your photos? In most cases, they'll give you a few weeks notice to get download your content, but that's something you'd have to verify in your terms of service agreement.

Accidents Happen

Sometimes things get deleted. It could be your fault, it could be theirs. But it doesn't really matter, does it? As I wrote in a past blog post, syncing problems can easily arise in the cloud. I highly recommend that youread this article here, and this article here because they both illustrate how easily these things can happen.

On the other hand, sometimes things don't get deleted. Let's say you have uploaded something that you really don't want saved. If you delete it, is the file really deleted from the company servers? It should be... but is it? How can you be sure? It's worth checking this stuff out before you decide on which service to pick because, whoops, sometimes things don't get deleted. I wrote a more in-depth post on your digital rights a while ago, which you can read here.

No Internet, No Access

If you have no internet, you have no access to the cloud, and this is precisely why the cloud doesn't make a great DPH just yet.I'm a firm believer that your memories should be accessible to you at all times without the need for subscriptions. Don't you agree? In a few years, maybe, but I don't think we're there yet.

The Cloud Interface

Apart from understanding the policies of the cloud service you want to use, the other big part is figuring out what type of user interface you need. You have to take into consideration who will be using it and their tech levels, but also the key question, which is:

Am I saving files, or am I saving stories?

There are three basic types of cloud interfaces: *the file & folder structure*, *the "good enough" basic photo storage interface*, and *the complete family archive interface*.

The File & Folder Structure

This system mimics your computer folder structure in its layout, so that it feels familiar to you. All you see is the name of the file, the size, and what folder it's in, and you work with it just like you would on your computer. If you're not going into your account to actually view your files (i.e. you're just keeping it as a backup), this is all you need. Good examples of the file & folder structure include Dropbox Basic, Google Drive, and most major auto-backup solutions, like Backblaze.



Backblaze is a cloud backup provider that has just a simple file-and-folder structure! You don't go there to visit your photos... it's just a backup! There's no photo viewing and it has limited organizing features.

The "Good Enough Photo Storage" Interface

This one's fun because it's more of a recent development. After figuring out that many people actually store photos in their cloud accounts, companies like Google, Amazon, Dropbox etc., have decided to make the interfaces just a little bit prettier for their users. It's still not great, but it's good enough. This type of folder structure lets you actually view your photos head-on (sometimes even in a slideshow). There are usually a few more organizational features available (yay), but you won't be able to put in your stories, or save your metadata safely.

In many cases, the terms of use agreements are what spoil these types of services, not the actual interface. A few good examples are Dropbox Photos, Google Photos, and Amazon Prime Photos.



Google Photos: An example of a "good enough photo storage" interface option. You can create albums and view photos in different ways, but don't expect any metadata to save, and most of all, beware of their terms of use!

The Complete Family Archive Interface

If you're saving stories, this is for you. When you're planning to look at your photos often, write down the stories, or collaborate with other family members on your heritage, a family archive is your best cloud storage option. These types of accounts have really beautiful interfaces, and you'll be able to do a whole lot more than just save files.



Forever is a great example of a complete family archive. Here's a screenshot from my account, which shows just how many options you have when working with your photos!

It a family archive a bit pricier than the basic account? Yes, but you also get your money's worth in terms of preservation and permanence. With this type of account, you're not really paying for storage, you're paying for better terms. Unlike your basic cloud accounts, you can expect to have privacy and control in a family archive. And more importantly, you're often buying, not renting, your storage. Compare it to buying a house vs. renting an apartment. You'll be able to curate something special for your descendants with an account like this. Instead of leaving them a mess, you're leaving them a legacy. The two best examples are Forever, and FamilyArc.

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FamilyArc is another great example of a family archive that makes it easy to collaborate with relatives. You can chat, plan reunions, and as you can see here, easily publish your milestones, values, and stories for the family to enjoy.

I happen to love the complete family archives! They are suitable for every tech level because they are much more user-friendly than the basic ones. The organizational features alone are worth the investment, and it's just so much more fun to be able to actually do something with your photos. Don't you think?

How did you choose your cloud storage solution? Are you saving files, or saving stories?

PS! Want to understand the family archives better? I go over this, and much more in my new e-course DPO PRO: The Ultimate Photo Organizing Masterclass. Students get an in-depth look at Forever, and a special offer from FamilyArc!

My Notes:



Want to Learn More?

DPO PRO: The Ultimate Photo Organizing Masterclass is a selfpaced on-demand e-course available September 1, 2016.

Visit http://www.dpopro.co