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5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Backing up a computer

- 1. Figure out what's irreplaceable** and back it up weekly: documents, photographs, videos and e-mails. You always can replace music and program files, like WordPerfect, says the Geek Squad's Matt Dworkin.
- 2. Record onto portable,** reusable media. Burning a CD or DVD is the quickest way to back up files, says Ann Westerheim, president of Ekaru, a Boston tech services firm. CDs hold 700 megabytes, and dual-layer DVDs usually hold 8.5 gigabytes (1 GB is equal to 1,000 MB). USB thumb drives -- aka flash drives -- are keychain-sized devices that will hold an average of 1, 2 or 4 GB.
- 3. Double up,** if necessary. Get a second hard drive if you're using too much space on your main one. Lack of room can kill your computer, says Richard Lee of Pillar Consulting Corporation in New York City.
- 4. Consider a virtual hard drive.** Online backup is a good option because it's automated, and data is stored on servers in a remote location, says Camille Hamilton of Austin-based CMIT Solutions. Look for a service with at least two geographically separated, secure backup centers. Data should be encrypted, and there should be a help line staffed 24/7.
- 5. Take a snapshot of all programs and data.** Disk imaging software, such as Norton Ghost by Symantec and True Image by Acronis, creates a replica of your entire hard drive, so if you crash, you're not rebuilding from scratch.

-- Mary Forsell

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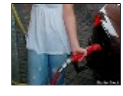
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