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TECHNOLOGY

Cloud Storage. Make way, external hard drives. Some online services will back up unlimited data for \$5 a month

BY HILLARY CHURA

IF YOU'RE LIKE MOST COMPUTER users, your PC or Mac is loaded with a gazillion family photos and other prized documents. Some of you may be sleeping peacefully believing that the external hard drive you picked up at Costco is backing up your data every night, but have you ever checked to see if it's configured correctly? What's really going on inside that black box? And what would happen if your house caught fire?

One high-tech—and essentially idiot-proof—alternative is to back up your stuff online.



A growing number of companies will automatically sweep your hard drive and keep a copy of the information that is there in the Internet "cloud." Many early adopters use Mozy or Carbonite, which allow users unlimited backup space for the cost of a latte each month. SugarSync and other

sites offer additional features like nonemergency access to backed-up files (e.g., the ability to update something in your office that you were working on at home) but can cost as much as \$25 a month.

OnlineBackupsReview.com is one good place to begin comparison shopping. Data en-

ryption is crucial. Customer service can be maddening. And although there have been horror stories—one storage site abruptly folded last year, leaving customers with little time to get their data—using the cloud is still a smart way to add an extra layer of security.

Experts note that no single solution is perfect, but that doesn't mean you should give up and do nothing. "How you select to do backup isn't nearly as important as doing it," says Mintel senior analyst Bill Hulkower. "If I'm a dentist, the first step is to get you to floss. Once you start, then you can decide the best product." ■

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